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COVER BACKGROUND: MAP OF MALAYSIA BEFORE 1950. TAKEN FROM ATLAS
KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA. REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE KETUA
PENGARAH, DEKAN BAHASA DAN PUSTAKA

MALAYSIA

STRAITS OF MALACCA

Alor Setar
Bujang Valley
Georgetown
Bukit Mertajam
Taiping
Pasir Salak
Tanjung Malim
Lake Chini
Kuala Lumpur
Linggi
Malacca

Kota Bharu

— Route of the Eastern
and Oriental Express

SOUTH CHINA SEA



Terumbu
Layang-Layang

Kota Kinabalu

Mulu

Niah

Kuching

FOREWORD

F

ROM the villages of Perlis to the longhouses of Sabah and Sarawak, Malaysia is a land of astonishing variety, home to 18 million people of various races and ethnic origins, a mighty mix of different religions, cultures and traditions.

Diverse images crowd the eye - wild green jungles that form the heartland of the country to the ordered rows of rubber and oil palm plantations, humble rural settlements where time seems to have stopped still to modern cities always in a hurry, age-old occupations of tilling the land and fishing the seas to high technology operations and industries.

Here is where the past, present and visions of the future are found together, sometimes mingling, at times colliding. It is not unusual to see a kampung house sprouting a television antenna, a bullock cart sharing the road with modern vehicles, executive suits passing robes and dhosis on the street, minarets of old existing alongside structures of the new.

This is the panorama of Malaysia, the sum total of its historical, socio-cultural and economic legacy captured in this year's New Straits Times Annual. Anchored on the central theme of Heritage, the annual ranges the topics from history, archaeology, education, crafts and culture to environment, economic progress, architecture, travel and sports.

Together with articles that trace the beginnings of the country and highlight the achievements that helped it overcome challenges and become strong are pieces that remember a man who did much to preserve the country's culture and a star that still shines long after his death.

The sweet simplicity of rural life is explored, as do irksome problems such as growing old, grappling with traffic jams and coping with the manifestations of the new materialism.

Pictorial spreads focus on rural pastimes where top-spinning and kite-flying are a game for men not boys and on Kuala Lumpur's heritage, dominated by the Sultan Abdul Samad Building clocktower which tolled the historic hour of midnight on the eve of August 31 1957 to herald the beginning of Merdeka.

Then there is Malaysia's natural heritage - the forests, rivers, animals, birds, fishes and cave networks. Stressing the message that these natural riches need not be destroyed in the name of progress, the articles are an eloquent cry for their continued survival and preservation.

The annual ends with a celebrated cartoonist's parting shot at what constitutes heritage.

Through all the diversity that characterises the country runs a common thread - a sense of shared identity and oneness, of commonalities that have somehow managed to bridge the differences. The feature on this kicks off the annual and sets the tone for the rest of the articles. By showing where the pitfalls might lie and the hopes may reside, it reveals where the true heritage of Malaysia can be found.

The Editor




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Photo: John Gano



A radiant Malay bride with fingertips dyed with henna and designs drawn with henna on the back of her hands—a custom borrowed from the Indians

ALTHOUGH we have often been described as a "plural society", in actual fact we are not one. It is true that we have many social differentiations, ranging from ethnic groupings, classes and regional affiliations to cultural behavioural patterns, religious pursuits or aesthetic experiences. Nevertheless, since independence, the government has consistently nurtured a policy of national integration.

The "plural society" label was more appropriate for describing the colonial society where little worlds were created for different groups of people to perform different functions with the linkage provided through the colonial administration. As pointed out by Raymond Kennedy, an American anthropologist writing during the Second World War years, "...the British colonial code draws the most rigid color line of all" ("The Colonial Crisis and the Future").

In fact, it was to undo the result of such a policy that the Malaysian government has constantly adopted the policy which features in our Five-Year Plans - to eradicate the identification of race with economic function.

Shared Heritage and Social Integration in Malaysia

*Malaysia is a potpourri of race, culture and religion, but with vision and will,
unity can be wrought from diversity*

BY MOHD TAIB OSMAN

Photography by Azlan Nain, Shahrul Azhar Shahbudin,
Mohamad Ikram Ismail



In traditional Malay costumes but definitely not on traditional Malay transportation



Such an economic stance has far-reaching results: it touches on all aspects of Malaysian life by downplaying the inherent differences and promoting the commonness that we share.

Like most other nations, ours is a heterogeneous society where social and cultural differentiations are the rule rather than the exception.

In the past, it was usual to hear of moulding such a society into one single nation or community through such policies as the melt-

ing pot or social assimilation, but events all over the world have indicated that human beings will resist if their inherent identities are threatened. A more rational approach is to promote social integration rather than assimilation to create a viable society.

One of the most important ingredients for social integration is to have a communicative medium, which in our Malaysian case is the adoption of the Malay language as the national and official language which is functional.

If such a medium is not functional and remains only as a symbolic national language, it is going to be a dead language.

In the case of Malay, it is actively used as the language of education as well as the official language for government administration, law courts and official functions. As long as it remains so, it is the language that will promote our national integration.

Apart from language, the education system plays an important role because it is through the schools that the citizens of tomorrow become socialised and encultured in the Malaysian vintage of world-view, knowledge and ethos or social values.

We can say that all these occur at the national level of social integration, as do the other infrastructural public facilities that we Malaysians enjoy such as the security provided by the armed forces and the police, communication such as the road system, postal services or telephone lines; health such as the hospitals and clinics; recreation such as stadiums and parks; and so on.

These, however, are highly visible as they touch on the official life of individuals, especially socially, that plays just as important a role in promoting social integration. An example of this would be the sharing of cultural elements such as practices, food or ornamental decorations.

Our great religious traditions too have accrued a great deal of cultural elements that sometimes, as in the case of Islam, ran afoul of the strict tenets and teachings of the religion.

Otherwise, the religious observances have actually acquired cultural significance, for the spiritual basis of religion is relegated to the background while the cultural traditions and practices have come to the fore.



A Malay wedding procession



The bunga telur, the traditional gift of hard-boiled eggs to wedding guests, has taken on a modern look

Such a tendency is made possible because of the social nature of religious observances. Thus the ulamas have for years tried unsuccessfully to stamp out the cultural shows held in celebration of the Hari Raya.

It is this social tendency of our religious observations that has served the cause of our national integration positively: today, the "open house" held at all the major religious cum cultural festivals is becoming institutionalised as a Malaysian way of life.

Thus a practice which in its original form intends to inculcate intra-group orientations has been turned around to bridge inter-group segregatedness.

In fact, cultural borrowing has been a feature of cultural contact in Malaysia. If we look at the Malay culture today, it reflects an age-old experience in cultural contacts.

While many of the borrowed elements have at long last been abandoned, like most of the Hindu-derived beliefs and customs which run counter to Islamic teachings, there are still unmistakable vestiges of ancient Hindu influence which linger, some even serving present-day needs.

The institution of the paramount ruler of Malaysia for example serves as the political expedient of bringing together separate entities into a national modern state, but symbolically retains the trappings of the 15th Century Malay kingdom and notion of kingship, which, although given Muslim reinterpretations, was actually rooted in the Hindu ideology of the "devaraja."

If such a borrowing has been driven by political strategy and can be said to take place intra-culturally, much more borrowings had taken place inter-culturally, arising from living side by side.

A cloud of yellow saffroned rice falls like a gentle blessing on this Indian bridal couple



PHOTO BY S. RAMAMORTHY



The "plural society" of the colonial vintage did not encourage cultural borrowing on account of social and psychological distance between the groups, but it may still happen because of time or psychological factors. Over a period of 500 years, the Chinese Baba, Indian Ceti and the indig-

enous Malay communities in the historical city of Malacca have borrowed cultural elements such as language, dressing, customs and implements from each other.

In our modern society of today, not only do conscious government policies and programmes promote cultural in-

teractions between different cultural groups, the way of life also demands and provides intersections of people based mainly on knowledge, skills and expertise rather than group affiliations.

The group in a modern society has gone beyond identifications such as ethnicity, religion or region and acquired new dimensions like class, occupation or even recreational interests. However, the traditional cleavages are still dominant because they are highly visible and determine much of the group's cultural behaviour and identity. Nonetheless, the distance between such groups is reduced when there is a great deal of cultural borrowings by each group.

Take a Malay wedding, for instance. The cutting of the bridal cake, the bridal dress, the floral bouquet carried by the bride, or going on honeymoon are definitely inspired by Western culture. The same can be said of the Chinese, Indian or Kadazan weddings today. This is one way a culture enriches itself, for there are more behavioural alternatives



A Penan marriage rite involving a rooster

provided by the culture. A heterogeneous society therefore can enrich its sub-cultures as in the case of Malaysia.

Another example which is highly visible is the dressing. The "batik" has transcended cultural barriers as Malaysians from all groups proudly attire themselves in Malaysian batik creations, especially for public functions. The "baju kurung moden" or "kebaya" is worn by Malaysians irrespective of their ethnic origin.

Beyond cultural borrowing is the adoption of each other's food and culinary arts. In this respect,

the television helps - programmes on cooking seem to be a favourite with the audience, otherwise there would not be so many of such programmes.

Of course, the food business has a part in it, but with Malaysians, food appears to have graduated from a basic human necessity to a matter of art and taste. Ranging from the combination of various ethnic dishes usually called the "Muhibbah Menu" by restaurants and hotels serving official dinners, to the preparation of food in everyday life, dishes from the different groups are no

longer "exotic" but normal fare.

Thus we find the "rendang" gracing the Chinese table, "chop choy" or "sweet sour fish" the Indian table, "chapati" the Malay table, and the "kari ayam" served on the "ruai" of Iban "rumah panjai" for visitors.

The modern way of life has also created new types of group affiliations which cut across the traditional groups.

Besides social classes and occupational groupings which have received greater attention by writers and scholars who describe such groupings as based on me-



Going for the honeymoon by trishaw

chanical relationships, there is an increasing number of groupings based on leisure needs created by modern living.

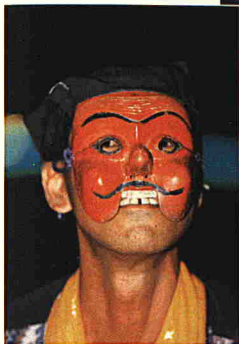
These are recreational groups manifested in clubs or associations to pursue certain interests, not only in common games like golf and tennis but also hobbies like aeromodelling or collecting vintage cars.

Of course there is still the touch of social class or occupation in the formation of such groupings; nevertheless, it helps to promote social integration in so far as it reduces the traditional cleavages in our Malaysian society, such as those based on ethnic, religious or cultural identities.

We have touched on national level of social integration through the sharing of common infrastructural facilities, but nothing is more effective for this purpose than the education system.

The promotion of the National Language as the medium of instruction for our national education system without





Chinese opera is also part of the Malaysian heritage

barring the teaching of other languages, whether local or foreign, has stood us in good stead in that the generation of Malaysians who had undergone the system are quite fluent in the language.

However, although public usage of the national and official language is taking place as expected, the private sector seems to be dragging its feet over the matter even after 37 years of independence.

As lamented by some of our social thinkers in the local press, as long as the national language is not used widely in the private sector, especially in commercial transactions, it will remain a language only for the public sector.

Undoubtedly there are certain factors which stand in the way of social integration. Some scholars have pointed out that the positive steps taken can easily be ne-



A native beauty, part of the Malaysian society

gated by factors like the openness to the globalisation process or even family influences.

This is true and in fact is the perennial problem of all planners. In any programme, hidden impeding forces are to be expected. In government endeavours to promote social integration among Malaysians, there are bound to be obstacles to overcome.

To bring the people of Sabah and Sarawak closer to the people of Peninsular Malaysia and vice-versa, many programmes have been instituted, including improved telecommunication services, but the South China Sea will always remain the biggest physi-

cal obstacle of all.

Thus while the school promotes integration, the family influence may counteract all the efforts, or at least diminish their effectiveness to some extent. Under such circumstances, it will pay in the long run if we do something than not do anything at all.

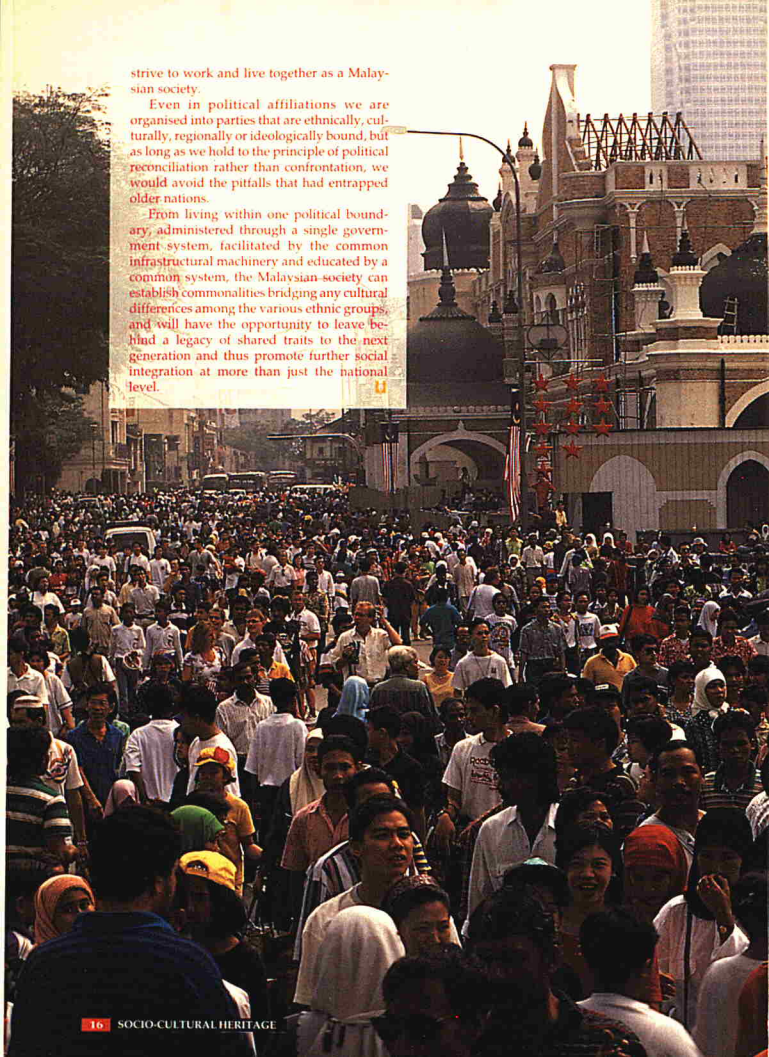
We no longer live in the separate worlds of a "plural society" but in a society which, although heterogeneous in nature, has the vision and will to integrate the differences into a viable whole.

We may still retain our ethnic, religious, cultural or regional peculiarities, and integrate among ourselves at that level, but we

strive to work and live together as a Malaysian society.

Even in political affiliations we are organised into parties that are ethnically, culturally, regionally or ideologically bound, but as long as we hold to the principle of political reconciliation rather than confrontation, we would avoid the pitfalls that had entrapped older nations.

From living within one political boundary, administered through a single government system, facilitated by the common infrastructural machinery and educated by a common system, the Malaysian society can establish commonalities bridging any cultural differences among the various ethnic groups, and will have the opportunity to leave behind a legacy of shared traits to the next generation and thus promote further social integration at more than just the national level.





An East Indiaman (right) at anchor in Penang harbour. On the left is a Chinese junk

Penang-A Cultural Melting Pot

They came from all corners of the world, this motley crowd, to an emerald isle in a tropical sea, there to seek their fortune and take their place under a new sun

BY SHUKOR RAHMAN

LYING as it does at the crossroads of great civilisations, Penang, more than any state in Malaysia, is the country's cultural melting pot. In the early years of its founding, the island attracted all races of people from seemingly all points of the compass.

Apart from the Kedah Malays who made up the largest group, there were Europeans, Arabs, Armenians, Jews, Burmese, Thais, Bugis, Ambonese, Japanese, Acehneese, Rawanese, Minang kabaus and

other Malay groups, Tamils, Malabaris, and other South Indian groups, Gujeratis, Bengalis, Parsis and other North Indian groups, Cantonese, Hokkiens, Hakkas, Teochews, Hainanese and other South China groups. Later came Ceylonese, Sikhs, Japanese and Filipinos.

All these groups were simultaneously involved in the creation of a cosmopolitan city. Even today, Penang is distinguished by the many ethnic minorities and historical communities which add to the richness of Malaysia's mainstream Malay, Chinese



Captain Francis Light raises the Union Jack at Point Penaga to take formal possession of Penang (from an early painting)

and Indian cultures.

Historically, the convergence of communities can trace its beginnings to the founding of Penang by Sir Francis Light in July 1786 and establishment of Georgetown as the capital the following month. Light reported that "... our inhabitants increase very fast, Chulias (South Indians), Chinese and Christians. They are already disputing the ground, everyone building as fast as he can."

The founding of the sparsely populated island attracted settlers seeking to make their fortune under British protection. Light's first municipal act was to sink a well at the head of Light Street. Even with no other amenity provided, the settlers had built some 200 attap-roofed shophouses.

The inhabitants were said to number about 10,000 in 1792, mostly crowded in a poorly-drained and swampy area around the harbour where many died of fever. Among the victims was Light himself, who succumbed to what was probably malaria on October 21 1794.

At the time he founded Penang, Light was no stranger to the Malay world as he had been trading in the region since 1772 together with his common-law wife Martina Rozells, a local Eurasian of Portuguese descent. He was fluent in Malay and had befriended not only the Kedah royalty but heads of the local communities. Leaders of the Malay, Tamil Mus-

lim, Straits Chinese and Eurasian communities from Phuket, Aceh, Malacca and the Kedah coast who settled on the island during Light's lifetime can be considered Penang's pioneer settlers.

Penang was more than just a port. The colony which Light created offered a liberal haven where each settler could establish the foundation for future generations. This was true for the Malays escaping Siamese attacks in Kedah, the Eurasians fleeing religious persecution in South Thailand, the Chinese rejecting Manchu oppression to make their fortunes in the Nanyang (South Seas) and the South Indians leaving poverty and strife in their subcontinent.

It was also true for the Straits Chinese and Indian Muslim traders from Malacca and the coastal areas seeking new opportunities, the Burmese and Indians who followed their colonial employers to a new land, the Armenian, Persian and Jewish diaspora extending their trading chain east of India, and the Arabs and Achehnese moving in to consolidate their spice trade and propagate Islam in the region.

In November 1821, the Rajah of Ligor invaded Kedah with an army of 7,000 and took possession of the state for his liege lord and master, the King of Siam. As a result, a large number of Malays from Kedah, who naturally preferred British to Siamese protection, poured into Penang island and Province Wellesley on the mainland.

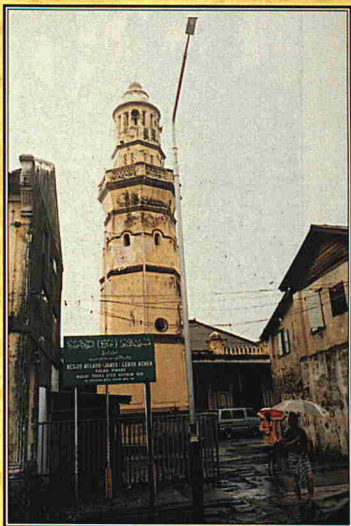
At that time the population of Province Wellesley did not exceed 5,000. But by October 1835, it multiplied to 46,800 with Malays numbering 42,500, Chinese 2,252, Bengalis 579, Chulias 549, and Siamese 500. Penang Island had a population of 37,844 made up of Malays (16,435), Chinese (8,751), Chulias (7,886), Bengalis (1,322), Europeans and their descendants (790), Native Christians (708), Siamese and Burmese (648), Bataks (561), Acheneese (350), Arabs (142), Parsis (50) and Armenians (21).

In early Penang, regional traders brought pepper, clove, nutmeg, gambier, ivory and other produce of the Malay region to be sold to European, American, Arab, Indian and Chinese ships. Areca nuts, birds' nest and small quantities of tin were mainly exported to the China market while the British traded woollens, chintzes, and opium for spices. In the mid-19th century, a rise in the world tin market created a "tin rush" of Chinese coolies to the Malay states of Perak and Selangor.

The earliest Malay urban community in Penang flourished around Achene Street (Lebuh Acheh). During the first century of Penang's founding, the bulk of regional trade was conducted with Aceh in north Sumatra, which became the centre of the spice trade after Malacca came under Dutch rule, but the "pepper ports" were often troubled by feuding chieftains. Penang offered a protected harbour where spices brought by Malay, Acheneese, Indian Muslim and Arab traders from north Sumatra could be resold to European and Chinese vessels.

By the 18th century, Aceh was already settled by Arab and Indian Muslim traders who made it the focal point for the spread of Islam throughout the archipelago. One of these Arab traders was Tengku Syed Hussain Al-Aidid, a member of the Acheneese royal house. In 1792, Syed Hussain and his clan moved to Penang where he set up an office and a godown at the waterfront at the end of Achene Street. Francis Light considered him "one of the wealthiest men on the island."

Syed Hussain also established the Achene Street Mosque in 1808. This is the oldest mosque on the island to survive largely in its original form. It has a Chinese swallow ridge roof and a verandah with a low stone seat. Syed Hussain died in 1840 at a ripe old age and was buried beside the mosque, as is customary of mosque founders. The family tomb is en-



Minaret of the Lebuh Acheh Mosque



Penang waterfront in the 1940's



A Boria troupe in Highland kilt

closed in a timber structure embellished with Quranic phrases. The surrounding cemetery also has a number of intricately carved Acehese gravestones.

Khoo Salma Lubis, author of the book *Streets of George Town, Penang* said the mosque is concealed from Aceh Street by a row of Muslim shops. "This 19th century layout, providing only a narrow entrance to the mosque compound, is not unlike those of the neighbouring Chinese clan associations," she said. The bungalows around the mosque, according to her, are survivors from the 19th century kampung whose residents comprised Acehese, Malays, Arabs and Peranakan. These Indo-Malay half-masonry half-timber buildings are among the earliest urban dwellings of the Muslim community.

Acheen Street also became known as the "Second Jeddah". Pilgrims from all over the country and from as far as Sumatra and Thailand gathered in Penang to await the ship to Jeddah. The mosque was a centre of prayer and religious discourse to prepare pilgrims for their journey to the Holy Land. The area was busy with the activities of pilgrim brokers, ticketing agencies, hotels, shops and printing presses which published most of the northern region's Islamic literature. This bazaar died out with the advent of the aeroplane.

According to Salma, the Chinese know this street as Pak Cheok Kay (Stone Workers' Street) because of the Chinese stone-workers who carve pestles and

mortars, in addition to Chinese and Islamic tombstones.

Penang was also the birthplace of Boria, a popular tradition among the Aceh Street community. Boria was a form of entertainment staged by ordinary folks who combined song, dance and satirical sketches. In pre-war days, Chinese magnates such as Gan Ngoh Bee used to invite Boria parties to perform at their residences.

In 1867, control of the Straits Settlements was transferred from India to the Colonial Office in Singapore. The opening of the Suez Canal two years later speeded up Penang's development. Increasing British intervention allowed the agricultural and tin potential of the Malay States to be further exploited and Penang flourished as the export centre for the northern hinterland, especially after the development of the FMS Railway.

Victorian traveller Isabella L. Bird visited Penang in 1880 and wrote: "The sight of the Asiatics who have crowded into George Town is a wonderful one, Chinese, Burmese, Javanese, Arabs, Malays, Sikhs, Madrassees, Klings, Chuliahs and Parsis, and still they come in junks and steamers and strange Arabian craft, and all get a living, depend slavishly on no one, never lapse into pauperism, retain their own dress, customs and religion, and are orderly. One asks what is bringing this swarthy, motley crowd from all Asian lands, from the Red to the Yellow Sea,

from Mecca to Canton, and one of my Kling boatmen answers: Empress good - coolie get money, keep it."

The Hokkiens from Amoy claim they were the earliest immigrants and Chinese words in the Babas' (Straits Chinese) pidgin Malay tend to support this claim. They are still more numerous than other Chinese in the former Straits Settlements. But it was Western trade after the Napoleonic Wars and then tin and finally rubber that attracted an endless flow of Chinese from Kwangtung (Canton) as well as from Fukien to Penang and the Malay States as these came under British rule.

Historian Sir Richard Winstedt, formerly of the Malayan Civil Service, described the Chinese thus: "Endowed with the laughter and manners of an ancient civilisation, they mix with other races with innate good nature and are delighted to welcome them to their entertainments, but never into their businesses. No trespasser may ever enter their commercial preserves."

As Penang is steeped in Baba Nyonya culture, many festivals are still celebrated in the old way as far as possible but this is fast dying out as the older generations pass away. The Dondang Sayang, a unique form of performing arts popularised by the Baba Nyonya community, is particularly threatened. Datuk Khoo Keat Siew, 64, a Baba himself, said Dondang Sayang seems to be dying out.

"Dondang Sayang today appeals only to the oldtimers. The younger generation, unfortunately, are not interested. They are not attuned to this type of music and prefer modern music. About 20 years ago, attempts were made to revive this once popular form of entertainment but these were not so success-

ful. It will die out unless more determined attempts are made.

"Funding is a big problem, and we hope state departments and national bodies would be more generous. With more funds, competitions could be held, say among factories. It has the potential to be popular. Every year on Chap Goh Meh (last day of Chinese New Year) when the Dondang Sayang coach stops at Gurney Drive, the crowd will join in and dance along," said Datuk Khoo.



The original "Nasi Kandar" enjoyed by the roadside or under a tree



The commercial centre of Bishop Street, Penang, in the old days



Chulia Street (Lebuh Chulia), Penang in the 1930's

The Babas and Nyonyas or Peranakan are descendants of immigrants from China who sailed to the Malay Peninsula as far back as 600 years ago. Many settled down with local women, and the result is the intermingling of customs and cultures which developed into a unique and distinct tradition. Till today, the Peranakans will still observe their own strict rituals, customs and manners, passed down the generations by oral tradition, especially during special occasions like birth, courtship, marriage, death, birthday and other celebrations.

All southern Indians, Tamils, Telugus and Malayalis were locally called Klings after the mediæval kingdom of Kalinga that covered the northern Circars or territory north of the Coromandel Coast. Although the use of the term is a tribute to the greatness of his past, the southern Indian now regards it as derogatory. Half-caste Indians like Munshi Abdullah, who was half Tamil and half Arab, have played a great part in writing the Malays' literature of translation, introducing them to Indian folk-lore, romance and mysticism.

Local history buff Nahul Meera, 45, said Malaysia also owes its favourite national rice dish, "nasi kandar", to the southern Indians who were port workers at the Penang waterfront since the 1920s. From its humble origins when it was served on banana leaves, nasi kandar today has certainly come a long way.

In the late 1940s, the great majority of Indians in the country were Tamil labourers from the Madras Presidency, who worked on rubber estates, railway and in the Public Works Department, and usually returned home after three years. Northern Indians were fewer, but included men of many races - Punjabis, Bengalis, Afghans, Pathans and Mahrattas. Many Punjabi Sikhs and a few Pathans became policemen. From Ceylon came not only Tamil clerks

but also a few thousand Sinhalese jewellers, carpenters, barbers and labourers. In 1947, there were just under 600,000 Indians and Ceylonese in Malaya.

The northern states, having been a subject to Siam until 1909, had a large sprinkling of Siamese residents. A Burmese community of fishermen and farmers settled in Pulau Tikus during Light's time, and the Burmese village was known as Kampung Ava. Some educated Burmese were also brought in as government surveyors. The Thai community settled

in Penang not long after the Burmese.

The two communities observe Theravada Buddhism and have long since inter-married with the local Chinese. The Burmese and Thai temples located on either side of Burma Lane attract large numbers of Chinese Buddhists. The Burmese village became part of Pulau Tikus, a town that has always been the home of Penang's Eurasian, Burmese and Thai minorities.

The first Buddhist temple on Penang Island is the Burmese Temple founded in 1803 on land donated by Nyonya Betong. As financial patrons and dedicated volunteers, women devotees have been the mainstay of this temple.

The Thai temple, Wat Chaiya Mangkalam, has a 33-metre Buddha which is the third longest in the world. Behind the temple is a small Thai village as well as a Thai cemetery. The temple and Thai community already existed in the early 19th century. As a gesture to promote trading relations with Siam, the land was granted by Queen Victoria in 1845.

Puan Buang Khamis, 80, who lived in Jelutong during her childhood, recalls going to the Thai temple in Green Lane (now Jalan Masjid Negeri) to watch menora, wayang kulit and other cultural performances with the kampung folks during the annual "tambun" day when philanthropists donated sand and earth to raise the level of the low-lying area. "There was very little entertainment in those days so the locals certainly looked forward to such festive occasions," she said.

Arabs, though only a few thousand in number, have great influence due to their religious status and wealth. In 1947 there were about a thousand Jews, some of them the wealthy owners of large properties in Singapore. Filipinos, Boyanese, Bataks, Tibetans, Annamese and Turks add to the human miscellany.

The age of the steamship, followed by that of the

telegraph, facilitated the swift transmission of information, revolutionised trade and commerce, and allowed the Straits Settlement society to keep up with Western fashions. At the turn of the century, the regional trade had expanded enough to encourage leading European companies in Singapore to establish branches in Penang. The golden age of Penang was ushered in by the tin, rubber and shipping industries. In those days, Medan, South Thailand and Rangoon looked to Penang as a provincial capital.

In 1888, commercial and social life revolved to some extent around the arrival and departure of the mail steamships. The P & O Line ran a fortnightly service, and first class fare to London was \$340, while return fare to Hong Kong with one native servant, was \$110. The subsidised Negapatam Line ran a frequent service to India.

H J Hartyn of No.10 Beach Street had in stock Dutch cigars, clarets and provisions while Everett & Co's shop displayed: 'Just received - a supply of novels and other books, American editions, dance music, sentimental and comic songs.' Dance music was simpler then - the Valse, the Polka and the Lancers being dances most commonly preferred. As for newspapers, there was the Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, printed and published by James Young Kennedy at Logan's Building in Beach Street.

The only regular public transport were trams which ran on the Ayer Itam Road. Other vehicles offered for public use were gharries, jinrikishas and bullock carts. The gharry was a carriage drawn by a pony or ponies, while the bullock cart was a much earlier form of transport - both the bullocks and drivers coming from India. The jinrikishas were a Chinese invention.

The wealthiest citizens had their own carriages and rarely used a jinrikisha or gharry. All the larger houses of the period had the carriage porch, an essential feature of Straits architecture, with stables well apart from the dwelling so as not to attract flies there. Servants' quarters were almost equally detached so as to minimise cooking smells. Horses were ridden as well as driven, and a paper chase on horseback was the local equivalent of hunting.

In 1890, the Town Hall at the Esplanade was improved, its entrance hall enlarged and four more



The Pearl of the Orient today

PHOTO BY SALEH OSMAN

rooms added. Used by municipal clerks in the daytime, these were to be supper rooms when a ball was held. At the same time, the stage was also improved. Nor was this all, for a town band was also formed. A grand piano was ordered but did not arrive until 1892. The band meanwhile came into being in 1890.

A bank manager in Manila was asked to engage several Filipinos as bandmen and they proved to be a great acquisition for the place. They were good musicians, orderly, sober and civil, and their performances were much appreciated by the public. The band usually played at the Esplanade, the Datuk Kramat Gardens (Padang Brown) and at the Golf Club.

In July 1904, electricity was made available to the public for the first time, initially supplying 41 arc lamps in public streets and 15 private households. Electricity was to revolutionise life in many ways and its success was immediate with a trading profit from 1906 but the oil lamps in the back streets died hard - it was only in 1926 before the last one was removed. Ceiling fans were first used in 1907 and only increased substantially in 1925. The days of the punkah and the punkah-wallah were over by that year. The mid-19th century saw an era of the greatest cultural fusion among the various ethnic groups that comprised the permanent community - they influenced each other, while being influenced by developments in their home countries.

Gradually over two centuries, the original Pearl of the Orient, where East meets West and where there is still a place for old world charm, developed its own cosmopolitan culture. It is here that one may encounter the graceful and timeless expressions of the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities brought together by a colonial past to evolve a colourful easy-going society.

*Architecture leaves
behind a legacy of timber,
steel, concrete and glass;
providing for future
generations physical
landmarks of the times
and life of the society
before them*

The Facade of A Society

PICTURES AND STORY BY
ANGELA HIJJAS

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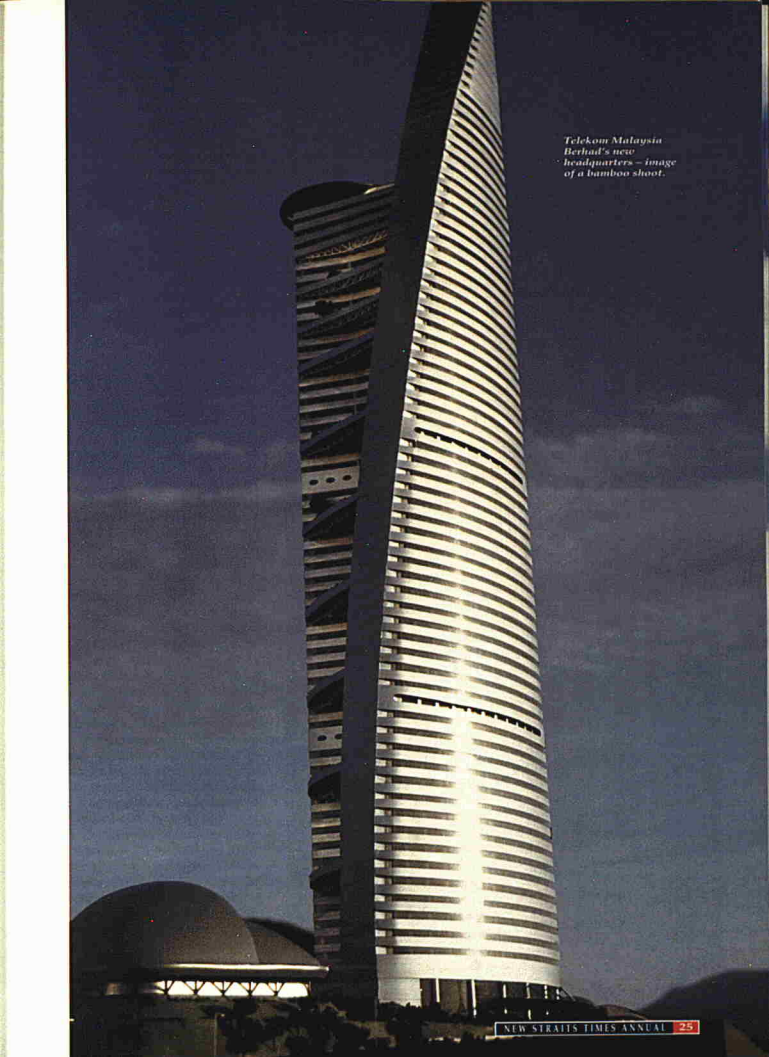
HE dictum that a city without old buildings is like a man without a memory is no less true because of the cliché. Malaysians now appreciate what remains of their heritage in building and are taking steps to preserve it, but what will future generations of Malaysians inherit of today, and how will they trace the continuity of their society from the past to the future?

Architecture is the most visible face of a society: the uses we build for, the materials we choose, the accessibility of people, handicapped and normal, the balance between aesthetics and economy, the technology we choose to use and why, all determine the nature of individual buildings and thus the city. What we build and how we use it shape the parameters for the way we live, they also provide a physical frame of reference for descendants to judge the standards of any generation.

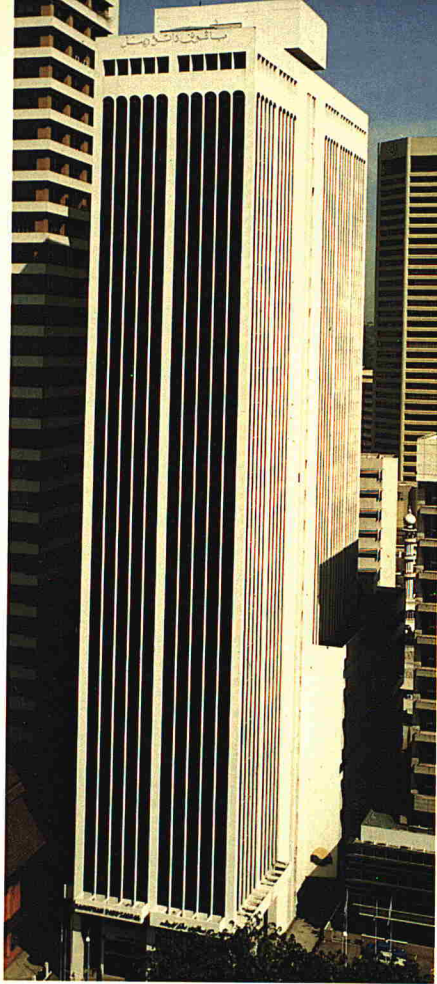
A community's sense of place and purpose hinges on common experience and memory; this sharing creates the identity of the group and its creations will become the symbols of its time. The generation that sought and achieved independence has its monuments in Parlia-



The city skyline of Kuala Lumpur in the late '80s.

A tall, slender, curved skyscraper with horizontal metallic bands, illuminated from below, creating a bright vertical glow. The building is set against a dark, cloudy night sky. In the foreground, a smaller, dome-shaped structure with a lit interior is visible on the left. The overall image conveys a sense of modern architecture and urban development.

*Telekom Malaysia
Berhad's new
headquarters - image
of a bamboo shoot.*



Bangunan Dato Zainal, a slim fit on a narrow site.

ment House, the National Museum and Stadium Negara. Their architecture represents a complete departure from the colonial style, which tended to be ossified in romantic visions of north Indian palace architecture.

New buildings after Independence broke with all that, simultaneously looking back to pre-colonial Malay istana architecture and forward to the development of a modern nation. These buildings were not designed by Malaysian architects, but they demonstrated the self image that the new rulers had chosen.

As structures become larger and more remote from the ideals of previous generations, the architectural dilemma has been how to select from the past, because we do need continuity, and how to interweave it with our experience of the present and our vision of the future. To go to extremes by blindly following the fashions of other countries, be it Japan or the United States, denies any individuality Malaysia itself might have.

Modern requirements are so different from those of only decades ago, how is the architect to relate scale, function and image to a past that built only domestic structures, mostly out of timber and thatch? How often half a century ago did an architect have cause to design a multi-storey building, or a factory covering acres, or housing in the hundreds of units? What materials and technology are there in common between then and now? How can such a transition of architectural style take place, tying together the past, the present and how we wish the future to be?

To suggest there has been so much change that there is no longer any relevance is to admit that we are severed from our past and do not understand the continuity of history.

Each architect has had to develop his or her own way of resolving these conflicts, creating the great mix of solutions that we

see around Kuala Lumpur: some truly in the international mould, others like overscale kampung structures, with every complexion in between.

An early study of converting traditional techniques to new purpose is the Cherating Club Mediterranean, a very traditional structure of timber and Kelantanese roof tiles. It was a departure from traditional uses, and without walls to many of its pavilions, it was contrary to the Malay tradition of buildings as enclosures.

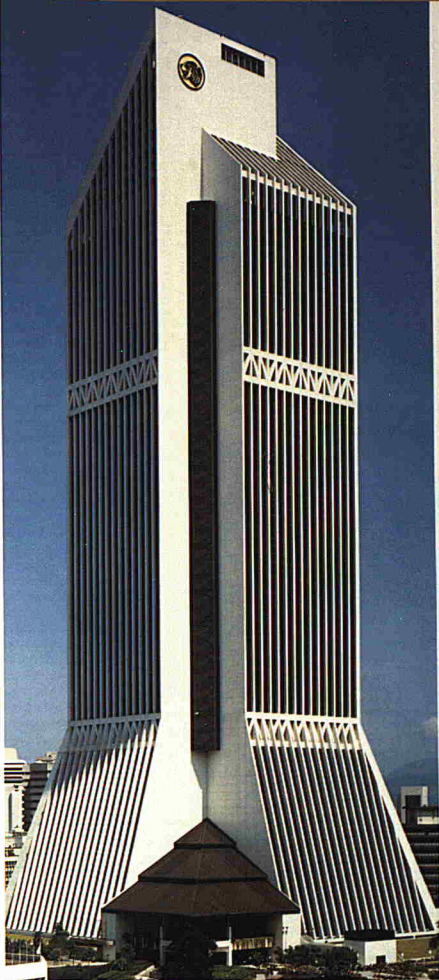
Among the tall buildings constructed was the Bangunan Dato Zainal, which caused a minor sensation in 1977 with the strong emphasis on its verticality and Islamic character.

At that time, all the other tall buildings in the city, like the Federal Hotel, the Merlin Hotel, the Hilton, Campbell and Pertama shopping complexes, Chartered Bank, Bangkok Bank and the AIA building either put strong emphasis on the horizontal layering of each floor or wrapped the whole structure with a screen.

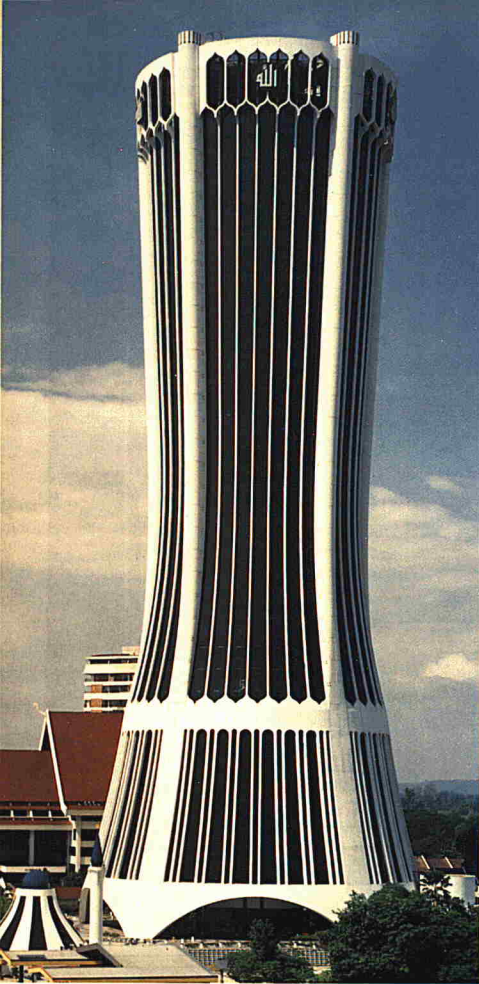
Bangunan Dato Zainal is extremely simple but it introduced new construction techniques (slip-forming of the core) and new materials (mould resistant acrylic paint). A 26-storey tower has little in common with any preceding structure in Malay culture, but by reaffirming its alignment with the architecture of Islam and its tradition of tall minarets, the crossing of the cultural and economic divide was tackled in an honest way.

For the Malayan Banking, the theme of verticality was continued, this time for more complex reasons. The building is much bigger and by failing to define each floor, the apparent scale of the mass is reduced. Because there is no visual point of reference, like a floor to floor gap, it is difficult to judge the actual size of the tower. The vertical fins also provide sun protection in keeping with the objectives of tropical architecture.

However, it is in the composition of angles in the massing that



Vertical detailing makes the mass look smaller.



Tabung Haji building, the city's largest minaret.



triggers a recollection of a past culture and building technique.

At street level, the most visible part of the building is the escalator canopies with the layering of horizontal roof ridges mounting the slope to the entrance canopy. Above the entrance canopy, the ridge angle becomes tilted to provide a transition to the more acutely sloping wall up to a height of 12 storeys, culminating in the sheer vertical tower of 53 storeys and a tapered roof line to echo the lower angles.

There was never a kampung house like this, but the suggestion made by the canopy roofs,



Concrete and steel, but still with a kampung look.

even though materials and purpose differ, is unmistakable. It allows for a gentle transition of massing appropriate for cultural continuity.

Another tower built at about the same time required a pronounced Islamic image – Tabung Haji, which manages and finances (through members' savings) the annual pilgrimage of thousands of Malaysian Muslims.

Like Bangunan Dato Zainal, the verticality recalls the monuments of Islam. The five pillars were the structural minimum, recalling the five tenets of the religion; the pre-cast pattern on the roof over the



A cascading of canopies.



Adapting the principle of kampung architecture that frees the ground level for other uses.



Club Mediterranean Cherating, one of the world's largest timber structures.



An Islamic design for tropical use.



Tapered curves recall the stupas of India.

*Tropical design
of Bank Negara
Alor Star.*



A huge splash of green in the city centre.

drive reinforces the stress of a curved structure, but is also very similar to Islamic patterning.

The round waisted form does not owe much to our common vision of Malaysia of old; it is a functional arrangement of lifts, offices, car parks and shops that tried to look to the future rather than to the past, but it is still a building with which most Muslims feel an empathy.

Several other office buildings used the vertical technique to advantage and each has its own individuality, including the Majlis Perbandaran Petaling Jaya tower which uses the traditional triangulation patterns typical of Malay handicrafts as a decorative theme.

Several smaller buildings express a horizontal character. Each is cantilevered over the ground, the extended roofs protecting the

walls from sun and rain. The Syaria Court in Kuching is obviously Islamic while the Bank Negara design in Kedah was strongly influenced by the organic curves of the coconut palms near the site.

The shopping complex Lot 10 has little in common with any traditional heritage, although the horizontal banding could be compared with the "blood and ban-



Eaves conceal the guttering of Kelab Darul Ehsan.

dages" architecture of the Sultan Sulaiman building and other colonial structures. The objective of the design was to inject colour and variety into the surroundings and to have as clean a structure as possible. The Shah Alam Stadium too can hardly claim allegiance to a tradition of architecture other than that of internationalism: the structure is just too big to be anything more than a sculptural form that tries to follow the tenets of classical proportions and aesthetics.

Kelab Darul Ehsan was strongly influenced by colonial club architecture, indeed it is a direct descendant, although the stretching of the eaves to conceal guttering gives the roof a lift at the edges that is typical of northern Malaysian and Thai structures.

This technique has since been widely copied, recognition that an idea drawn from the past that can be successfully converted for contemporary structures is quickly appreciated. People like their buildings, even new ones, to be familiar.

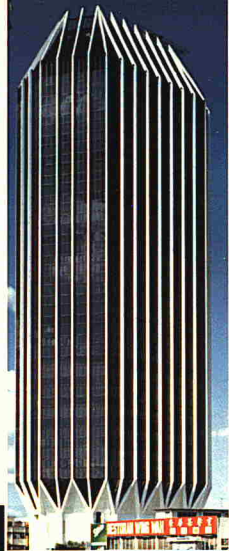
Development in domestic architecture has not been so radically affected by change. Most people would still prefer the kampung house in the city if possible, and that is the direction many have chosen.



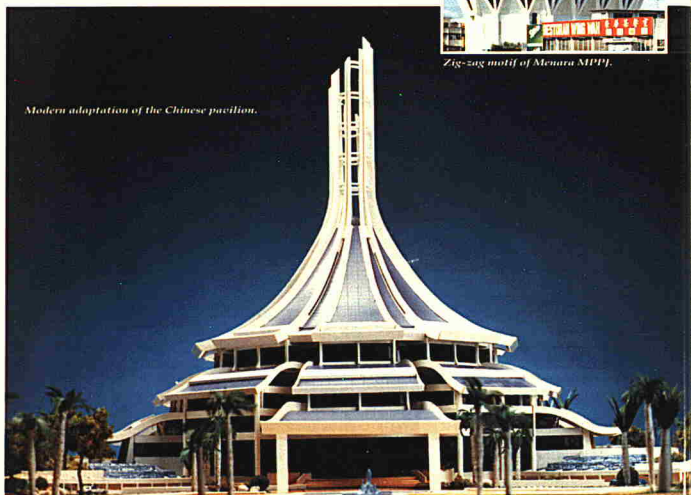
Layering of different roof canopies.



Another image of South East Asia – huge roof dominating the structure.



Zig-zag motif of Menara MPPJ.



Modern adaptation of the Chinese pavilion.


A project due to start construction is the headquarters for Telekom Malaysia Berhad in Pantai, Kuala Lumpur. The design for the enormous tower of over 60 floors has found its inspiration from sources other than old architecture.

In line with our growing awareness of the importance of the environment, buildings too have to lead into a new era. The floor plan is developed on the dual wing concept that worked so well for Malayan Banking, but rather than having an angular form, its inspiration is drawn from organic images.

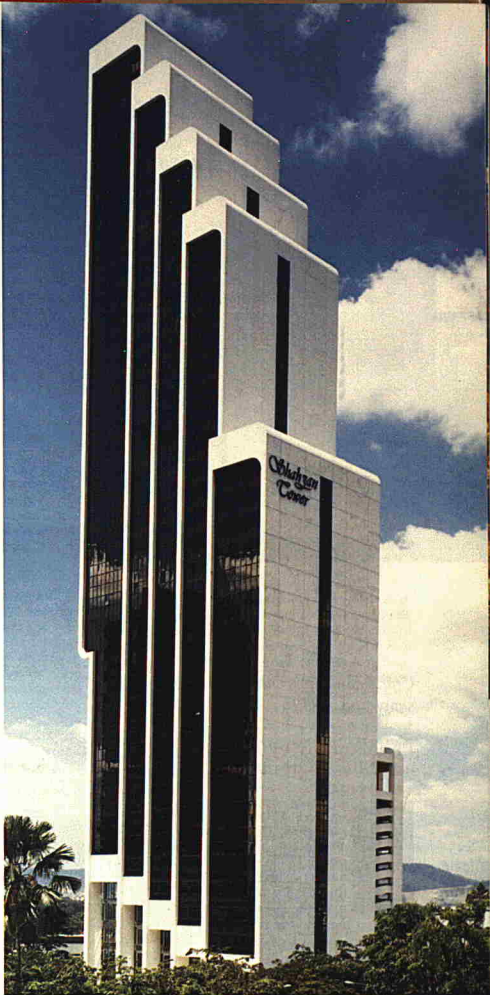
The bamboo shoot or pucuk rebong is the fastest growing plant known to Man; it telescopes upwards at a fast rate to exploit an opening in the forest before another plant can take the light. Traditional handicrafts have used this image extensively, few batik sarongs are without it, every floor mat has it and much architectural detail is derived from the same motif.

Obviously this huge building will be much more complex than such a simple image but its impact lies in the strength of its form, providing visual relief to the primarily angular buildings of the city.

The objectives of Wawasan 2020 involve more than attaining developed status. The rush for material fulfilment has to be tempered by a real appreciation of origins and background, an understanding of what makes us Malaysians rather than Australians or Indonesians, and a continuous development of Malaysian culture.

Culture is more than a colourful rendition of the tarian lilin and old buildings, we must create new dances and design new buildings that will be links in the continuous chain of growth. 

*Distinctive and
sculptural.*



Glittering lengths of songket.



A weaver at her loom.



BY ROZI ALI

Images of the Soul

Craftsmanship is culture and skills given shape and solidity

Photography by Roslan Khamis and Shafie Othman



Products of a labour of love.

TODAY'S artisan, in presenting the arts and crafts of his people to the world, must open his eyes to the past and the present. His mind dwells on the aesthetic imperatives of his chosen creative medium, his ears listen to the echoes from long ago while his hands, like a lover caressing his beloved,

strive vigorously to create and produce yet another piece of handicraft that serves to preserve his culture, heritage and legacy.

He is nothing less than a hero. A wira bangsa. Art is not the appanage of any particular people. It is a vital biological product. A people may be vanquished by force of arms. What it cannot do is surrender its soul, its feelings, its poetic bent and its *raison d'être*. If this happens, art ceases to exist historically as a mirror of a nation, a people. As succinctly put by Datuk Sulaiman Othman, Director-General of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC): "Crafts are symbolic mirrors of the soul of a nation. They reflect a way of life and enduring characteristics of a people."

For the artisan, there is no sharp cleavage between his craft and life.

He succeeds in merging reveries and reality, giving form to feelings and sojourning in the nation's artistic traditions. He transposes what lies in the heart of the people and the soul of the nation by leaping onto the plane of various artistic media and forms. He speaks through many languages – woodcarvings, rattan and bamboo crafts, pottery, silver and brass work, weaving, beadwork, embroidery and plaiting. Indeed, he strives to transform into visual language the richness and beauty of his culture or even the mystical that flows ceaselessly around him.

Take for instance the exquisite beadwork of the natives of Sarawak. It is not only meant for decorative purposes. Bead hats are worn among the Kayan to show the owner's status and wealth. With the Kelabit, it is a faux pas for the upper middle-class families not to use exclusively beaded baby carriers. The Kenyah meanwhile employ beads in most of their rites, such as the housewarming prayer.

As for the repertoire of Malay arts and craftwork, even a cursory examination will reveal the absence of images of Man, creatures and animals. Malay silver and brass ware, for example, are delicately adorned with motifs such as flower petals, leaves and coiled branches. These motifs are skilfully carved and intricately engraved on clay in Perak's Sayong Pottery and Kelantan's Mambong Pottery. Malay artefacts are imbued with Islamic values, embodying the essence of Tawhid and glorifying the greatness of God. The Islamic concept of aesthetic beauty lies in the premise that beauty itself is related to divine power and God's infinite riches. Art and crafts are an act of worship of Allah.

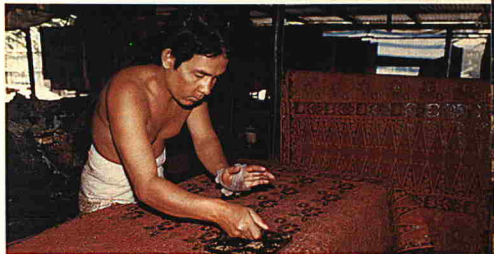
As a multiracial nation, Malaysia is a rich cultural complex – a mighty collective synthesis stemming from the blending of the various ethnic and cultural elements. Today's artisan has no lack of sources of inspiration. His responsibility is to observe the skills and quality of his chosen craftwork in keeping the heritage traditions of Malaysian crafts and arts very much alive. Yet as a creative being, he owes it to himself and his chosen art to explore new dimensions, to merge the past with the present.

He must bravely attempt a kind of re-socialization of his chosen medium. He could seek the roots of a particular handicraft and by using the same skills, retrieves or expresses them in a new form or shape. In this sense, his work must contain an intrinsic monumental trust.

The captivating and delicate pua weaving of Sarawak's Ibans, for in-



Bright and beautiful.



A batik maker imprints a piece of cloth with his special creativity.

stance, is usually created for use in religious rites and traditional ceremonies. But enterprising artisans have employed pua for a diverse range of use such as handbags, photo frames and wall decorations. Ngebat, an Iban textile technique literally called "tie-dye" or widely known as ikat, is popularly used by local fashion designers in their numerous designs.

New styles and techniques, deployed on all kinds of cloth, have given birth to an attractive and innovative batik with an unmistakably Malaysian identity. Like songket, batik has successfully made the transition to haute couture textiles.

As Sulaiman says, Malaysian batik finds an appreciative audience in Japan when subdued colours like light black, navy and white are used to present images of Japan's natural environment and four seasons. It is a case of



Giving pottery the personal touch.



Decorative ceramics.

using our traditional skills to produce Malaysian batik but with a distinct Japanese appeal. The concept is alluring – Malaysian batik with images of Japan.

In pottery, the creative potters have merged traditional elements with contemporary approaches to produce a myriad of items such as table lamps, all-purpose containers and bowls. From such labours of love, it can be said that creativity is the fruit of intuition, imagination, passion and sound common sense.

Thus, the noble duty of the modern artisan is to breathe a new lease of life into Malaysian crafts, to interpret and re-create old traditions, to create new traditions out of the existing ones and to make their works truly living crafts. He speaks through the crafts and with them; his work never comes to an end because he goes on merging something of himself with it all the time.

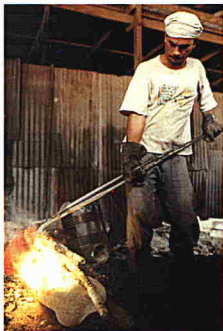
But even as he sharpens his focus on his artistic responsibilities, today's artisan is confronted with the question of how to reach his audience of far away, who may not share his cultural roots. How does he take his place in an industrialised society? Can he, who learned his craft from his mother and won knowledge from his sensitivities to his surroundings, possibly rise to the task of creating a commune for himself and his fellow artisans – a craft industrial community?

"It is not a lofty dream," says Sulaiman. "The country is blessed with three principal assets. One, the God-given wealth in terms of bountiful supply of raw materials from the sea, land and hills. The rich legacy of our craft culture, handed down from one generation to the next, and the abundant talent of our people in creating crafts of excellent quality. Then there's our multiracial cultural wealth which provides a fertile environment to nurture the artisan's creativity."

The country's artisans can confidently stride forward into the future through the current social, political and economic conditions which are conducive to the quest for the preservation and nurturance of the craft traditions. The thrust of the nation's five-year economic plans, namely the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Malaysia Plans, saw an increasing emphasis on developing the entrepreneurial spirit of the Malaysian, including that of the artisan. A far-sighted government which is equally sensitive to the task of preserving national heritage had helped spur the craft industry to greater heights. Skills training, technical assistance and marketing advice are continuously provided to the artisans.

Kraftangan, for example, offers specialised training programmes in traditional crafts. Apart from skills cultivation, the syllabus includes design, product development, promotion and business practices. Thus, the nation is assured of ever increasing trained artisans who are equipped to establish a commercially viable concern.

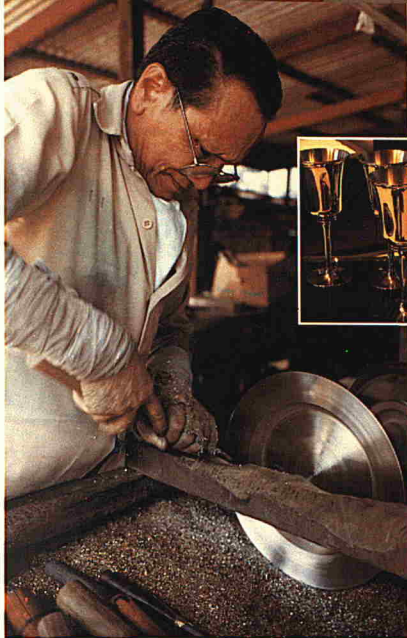
A task as precious as heritage preservation and national artistic expression should not be left floundering on the periphery of a manufacturing society. Hence the formation of the MHDC in 1979, to improve the local craft industry and develop it as an integral part of an increasingly industrialised society. And to make it an industry in



From fire, a handcraft product is born.



Applying the finishing touches.



A craftsman pouring all his skill into his work.



It has more than a thousand designs which are marketed in over 20 countries. Its designs are not restricted to local taste or flavour and perhaps this explains why it has enthralled many customers in the international market.

The Erik Mag-nussen collection, Gerald Benny collection and Wind-sor Rose collection may not sound the least Malaysian but these pewter lines are skilfully handcrafted from the highest quality Malaysian pewter by dedicated craftsmen. It is their skills that lend these lines an unmistakably Malaysian touch and feel. The golden rule: aesthetic values should never be sacrificed for crass commercialisation.

Royal Selangor has won several international awards including the prestigious Design Plus Award at the Frankfurt International Gift Fair in 1989 and 1991 and the American Pewter Guild Design Award in 1994.

"Our craftsmen must create a new demand and provide the consumers with a palatable choice of products. Our craft industry must be very competitive in terms of the product's design, quality and price and be efficient in terms of production. The point that we have to drive home is that Malaysian crafts must be among the big league," Sulaiman says.

According to him, a Craft Cultural Complex will be built in Langkawi and Kuala Lumpur by the end of 1995. These complexes will house exhibition areas, museums, sales rooms, traditional Malay restaurants, luxury hotels and regular craft demonstrations. Such a concept serves as an effective promotion and marketing strategy for both domestic and foreign tourists.

Indeed, with a vibrant craft industry in place, the force and charm of Malaysian creativity can reach out to the rest of the world. ■

the true sense of the word: viable, strong, cohesive and a leader in the international market for its beauty, quality and distinctive ethnicity.

It is an achievable agenda, says Sulaiman. "Malaysian handicrafts are not new in the world market. We are internationally recognised for our pewter. The question is what kind of product from our craft industry that should be marketed in the international market. Malaysian gold receives overwhelming response in the Far East market. Our ceramics are popular in the Korean and Japanese markets.

"But we must recognise that certain products may not be suitable for the export market. Songket is suitable for the local market. The batik industry is booming but is our bright and colourful batik making it in the world market? In this context, we are exporting our skills in the batik-making process where the end result is a piece of textile and not a piece of batik as we know it."

Today's artisans need therefore to explore new dimensions in existing traditions and develop an acute sense of perception to the needs of the consumers in the overseas market. He can seek inspiration from the success story of Royal Selangor Pewter. The world's leading pewter manufacturer is renowned for its excellent craftsmanship. Its tradition in innovation, its dedication to quality plus a superb craftsmanship are the factors for its global success.

Back to Nature Cures

Traditional medicine can play a role in complementing modern medicine but quacks have given it a bad name. Now, government regulation of the practice and the practitioners is set to give it a new respectability.

PICTURES AND STORY BY MUHARYANI OTHMAN



Viswalingam with some herbs used in Ayurvedic treatment

TRADITIONAL medicine pedlars, with their promises of cures for almost everything from body aches and pains to cancer and male impotency, have always been part of Malaysia's colourful street scene.

They put on a very persuasive performance as they mesmerise their audience with superb oratorical skills and theatrics.

The basic tools of their trade are a spread of cloth or a plastic sheet on which are displayed their assortment of merchandise, and a briefcase or bag containing newspaper clippings and other documents to back their sales pitches.

Their merchandise may vary from ointments to roots and herbs of every kind as well as amulets and talismans.

Besides their oratory power and showmanship, these pedlars also have other paraphernalia to attract their audience, such as a model of a certain part of the human anatomy used in support of sales promotion of infertility and impotency remedies, or a life-sized mannequin. Some even have a live band in tow!

Others have with them monkeys, snakes, birds or parts of animals which often play a part in the curing process or in its promotion. And it is not unusual to see a cat, rat and bird put into one cage to prove a point.

Because of Malaysia's cultural diversity, there is a wealth of traditional or folk medicine of various origins. The Malay, Chinese



Street medicine man Pak Din holding court

and Indian communities have since time immemorial depended on traditional medicine which has become complementary or an alternative to modern medicine.

For centuries, the Orang Asli too have resorted to their own means of curing the sick with the use of roots, plants and barks of trees. Though their use of these has not been validated scientifically, researchers have claimed to have seen their effects.

The World Health Organisation recommends governments worldwide to include alternative medicine in their primary health care programmes as it recognises the value of such medicines to each society.

Alongside the advancements in modern medicine, there is therefore a growing interest in traditional medicine.

A survey of cities and major towns in Malaysia will show the

popularity of traditional medicine. There are numerous locations and establishments where the services of these traditional healers are sought.

One of the medicine street peddlars plying his wares in the more affluent city of Kuala Lumpur is 82-year-old Pak Din Man, who hails from Sungai Bakap in Seberang Perai. He has been in the business for more than 20 years.

Pak Din will leave his village for the city towards the end of each month, to coincide with pay day, and stay on for the next two weeks or so.

His base is the pavement at the junction of Jalan Melayu and busy Jalan Masjid India. Before him are spread his cures and panaceas - roots, flowers, fruits, barks, seeds and twigs in their original form, powdered or made into ointments as well as extracts

from marine life.

Among the herbal plants, fruits and flowers are the buah delima batu for treatment of piles, worms and gastro-intestinal problems; bunga pagma for post-delivery treatment and jerangan merah for wind, numbness, diabetes and high blood pressure.

There is also the kakik or genggam Siti Fatimah for menstrual and post-delivery problems; nenas batu for piles and high blood pressure; kemuning for poisoning and the raja kayu for fever, fatigue, breathlessness and stings.

Most of these herbal plants are obtained from the island of Langkawi, according to Pak Din.

He also has with him an assortment of talismans, bottles of jungle honey and canes of various types and sizes including the tongkat lalat, said to drive away flies.



A Chinese herbal medicine shop

A visit to this popular spot in the afternoon will reveal a fairly large crowd already gathered around Pak Din. He holds court, extolling the efficacy of his cures.

A couple soon leave with a tongkat alat, a small bottle of ointment made from the oil of the ikan duyung and a piece of bone from the fish, claimed to be able to banish back aches and pains if worn around the waist.

Another customer is waiting for Pak Din to bless an assortment of flower petals and lime, usually used in baths to ward off evil spirits or bad luck, or to give

courage, good tidings or a change in luck. It seems Pak Din is also a part-time bomoh.

What else does Pak Din have in store? To an enquiry about the ikan duyung, the affable medicine man opens a suitcase containing a full-scale skeleton of the fish, the skull of which is as big as a human's but shaped differently.

To prove its authenticity, Pak Din shows a press cutting on the capture of an ikan duyung in Malaysian waters by a group of fishermen, a very rare find indeed, according to the report. It is said

the duyung can measure up to two metres and very few have been caught so far.

Almost every part of the duyung is deemed to be useful, from its meat to its skin, oil and bones for the treatment of a myriad of ailments and complaints, from asthma, coughs, bodily aches, bed-wetting, scalding, sprains, burns and snake bites to impotency.

Pak Din said he learned about traditional medicine from one of the masters for whom he used to work. Pak Din is passing on his knowledge to his 17-year-old son, Zulkifli, who travels with him.

With the skills and knowledge in traditional medicine being passed down from father to son or from master to novice, this sector of the health care system will no doubt continue to thrive.

Chinese medicine meanwhile has a very long history, with research and development in this field creating great interest worldwide, even among practitioners of modern medicine.

When the Chinese came to the then Malaya in the 19th and 20th century, they brought along with them this ancient practice.

Most Chinese traditional medicine practices here are family establishments where the knowledge and expertise are passed from father to son.

One such establishment in Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown is run by a father-and-son team, octogenarian Ng Kien Poon and his 38-year-old son, Ng Chee Yat.

The senior Ng, who learned about Chinese medicine from his forebears, goes to China twice a year to select the best herbs from there.

He attributes his good health to taking such herbs, mostly in soups and stews. "I eat and sleep well, and I have no health complaints so far," he said.

Compared to the Malay and ayurvedic practitioners, the Chinese medicine practitioners or *sinehs* as they are usually called are more organised. They have institutions to provide formal training in the field.

Chee Yat himself took a degree course at such an institution despite having earlier studied pharmacology in London.

The Institute of Chinese Medicine in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Ipoh offers a five-year degree course with practical training. The degree is issued by the University of Chinese Medicine in Guangzhou in China, on whose course the syllabus here is based.

Topics covered include the history of Chinese medicine, ancient Chinese medical theories, Western diagnosis, Western basic medicine, pharmacognocny, formulary, traumalogy, gynaecology, paediatrics, infectious diseases, physiology, parasitology and ENT.

Chee Yat said Chinese medicine is taken for the maintenance of health, usually in food preparations, and the treatment of long-term illnesses.

"It helps to improve immunity and general well-being in the recovery process of acute ailments and eliminates some of the side-effects of modern medicine."

The Indians and other ethnic groups have been known to resort to another form of traditional medicine, *ayurveda*, which is believed to be 6,000 years old and to have originated in India.

The word "*ayurveda*" is composed of two Sanskrit terms: "*ayur*" meaning "life" and "*veda*" meaning "knowledge". Taken together, it means the "science of life". However, in a limited sense, it is always used to imply "the



Herbal root to cure all pains

science of medicine."

This treatment uses a holistic approach, which means it also covers the patient's eating habits, diet and lifestyle.

D. Visvalingam, 37, was a geophysicist when his interest in ayurvedic medicine took him to India to learn more about it. He and his wife, Nita Gosalia, who was also trained in India, set up a herbal salon four years ago.

"We are now concentrating on external treatment, for skin and hair," said Visvalingam. "We hope to practise the whole form of treatment later."

"The problem is in getting some of the herbs. Even for our hair treatment, we have difficulty getting certain herbs from India which recently banned their export for fear of depletion."

According to him, many of the herbs used in ayurvedic medicine are also used in Malay and Chinese traditional medicine and their prescriptions are about the same.

"Ayurvedic medicine does not give you immediate results but there are no side effects unless it has been prescribed wrongly."

Some of the herbs used in ayurvedic treatment include the *arnica*, *bringraj*, *aswagandha*,

bhrami, *amla seeds*, *jatamansi*, *turmeric* and *mint*.

Visvalingam said although there are a number of ayurvedic practitioners in Malaysia they are not as organised as the Chinese medicine practitioners.

Due to the proliferation of traditional medicine in the market with unsubstantiated claims for cures and remedies for all kinds of ailments, the Malaysian government has found it necessary to regulate the practice.

The move is necessary in view of the numerous complaints of malpractice involving traditional medicine practitioners. Hence, the authorities have made it compulsory for them to register with the Health Ministry.

The ministry's Drug Control Division received applications to register 12,000 types of traditional medicine when registration closed on June 30. The deadline for registration in Sabah and Sarawak is December 13.

Regulatory control through registration is the only way to protect the public from traditional medicine which is unsafe or of low quality, and from those out to exploit the current craze for "natural" cures.



Food of every
description



Pretty aprons are a must for making murtabak

SOMETIMES you see them, sometimes you don't. They are not so much invisible as a travelling concern, tooting along a routine route or trundling to a spot of their choice to put down roots for the day or a particular stretch of time.

Some set up stock in the evening and fly by night, or rather, dawn. Some of the busiest ones like their itinerant cousins in many parts of Asia and even in the West offer a spread of food as their ware. They are the Malaysian street vendors who despite their mobility have become fixed as part of the local

Streetlife in Malaysia

Street vendors have enriched the local scene with their unique flavour, gaining an identity of their own as they vie with restaurants and stores in the food and retail business

BY RUBY KHOO
Photography by Ikram Ismail, Zahri Zakaria
& Ruby Khoo

scenery. For the food vendors, they owe their existence to the fact that Malaysians like to eat, and more than just three times a day. Those who are peevishly peckish at off-peak food hours like the dead of night can always find their teh tarik or whatever brand of brew they fancy at alfresco stalls up in the nearest street or alley.

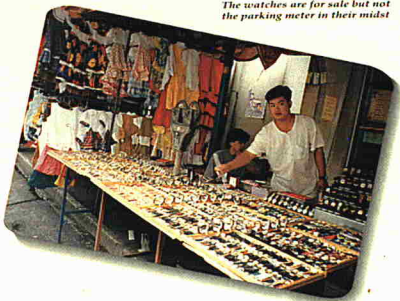
The off-and-on mobile vendors hawking hot meals of assam laksa, kuay-teow, Hokkien mee, mee rebus, freshly-cooked corn, kebab, ayam percik and other grub follow informal time-tables, dishevelled styles but occasionally great recipes. At one time, food stalls that favour office hours congregated (since then evacuated) in the shadow of a certain tall landmark in Kuala Lumpur and were collectively and grandly dubbed the Hilton drive-in in typical Malaysian jest. There are also those who install themselves in coffeeshops and pay rent.

You can gauge the fame-and-food rating of a single hawker by the time it takes him to sell-out and pack-up. The better the food, the faster it disappears.

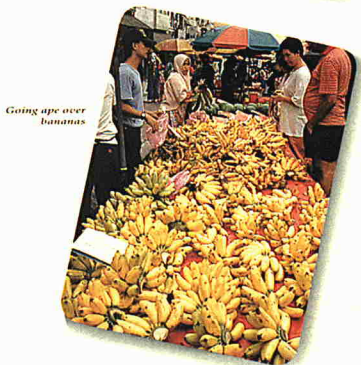
I once saw a rojak-seller in action, customers buzzing around him like flies as soon as his motorised cart pulled up at the side of the road. After anxiously plucking their portions, these people settled atop a log and nearby stools, contentedly consuming their rojak. But the rojak-man's quiet, deft motions, his chopping, cutting, scooping and mixing continued almost effortlessly, broken only by the exchange of money, until he ran out of ingredients.

There was no need to advertise, despite his idiosyncratic hours. The bits and pieces of his rojak speak so tastefully for themselves that customers keep on coming back while drawing oth-

The watches are for sale but not the parking meter in their midst



Attraction for the kids

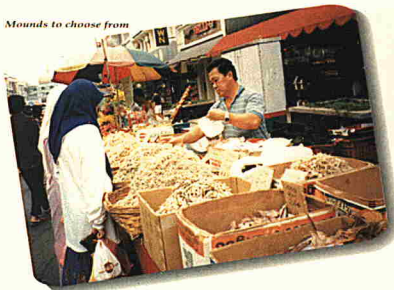


Going ape over bananas

Pavement shopping



Mounds to choose from



Satay galore

ers by word of mouth.

When a certain hawkker is touted to be consistently special, queues of locals would get in line for a packet of his chow. Taste cuts across all barriers, if the Protons, Toyotas, Mercedes, Volkswagens, Fords, BMWs, squeezed in slapdash, if not illegal, parking close by are any indication.

Drink stalls on the other hand do not command such a faithful following. Besides the common soya-bean and mata-kucing vendors, there are two kinds of tea stalls. One is the teh tarik stall, the other the kok-fa stall which sells different kinds of herbal tea, from bitter dark-brown draughts to the lighter, sweeter kok-fa varieties. For 40 sen, you uncup your choice of warm tea, with or without consultation, to wet your dry throat.

Then there is the bazaar. An outdoor street gathering of stalls and stands that sells everything from food to goods and begins in the evening is a pasar malam or night market. It is so called because it opens at night and closes at dawn. It appears only at designated locations and on designated days. During the interval, the vendors may flock like so many fireflies to light up another back street or lane, or move to another pasar malam.

If the vendors come out during the daytime to set up part-time residence on the sides of a street, they sometimes turn into rather permanent fixtures like the day and night market fringing Petaling Street.

A pasar malam site, by day, looks like any other street with roads lined with cars, houses or shops. It is during the evening that the transformation takes place, when members of the pasar malam fraternity arrive at their respective pavement lots by

*Like father
like son.....*

van or lorry and start fixing and filling their stands with goods from their vehicles, stringing fluorescent bulbs and erecting plastic shelters above them.

As everything, and I mean everything, gets spilled or laid out, from clumps of bright yellow bananas to psychedelic plasticware, fresh vegetables, sarongs, dried ikan bilis, dried sotong, bunches of balloons, tables of toys and a variety of victuals, cakes or cooked tidbits, people start dribbling in.

Some trip in to do their weekly shopping, some to browse, some for the food, some for the walk and some to *lepak*. Whatever it is, the street is soon swamped by men, women and children of all ages. Almost anything can be found at these pasar malams. Indeed, some are practically outdoor supermarkets but with odd overtones. Where else can you catch the startling sight of a battered old parking meter jutting out from a glittering expanse of watches?

Rambling through a pasar malam, you will soon discover that its texture consists of not just a trail of motley sights but also of smells, sounds and sensations that shifts as you stroll along.

It is always hard to escape from the influence of the cassette-tape stands which not only display but play their products for all they are worth. The alarm-clock vendors try for the same effect but their lack of amplification in open air surroundings produces only tiny tootles and beeps that serenade passers-by in different keys.

Every now and then, one



bumps into carry-all trolleys or kids that lag behind their dallying owners or parents. Little knots of people straggle in a ragged line, many towing bags or toddlers, along the vegetable and fruit stall stretch where one can catch the sweet, clean-cut smell of watermelons in the air.

At the vividly coloured flower stalls, assorted long-stemmed beauties sit in containers and baskets, waiting to be selected for special occasions and people. At the food stalls, the savoury smoke sometimes gets up your nose before you actually catch sight of the armed action of men and their gas-powered frying machines, stirring up a mass of *kuay-teow* or other stuff.

The pasar malam can be lik-

ened to an open-air circus that displays all its acts at once, with each little sideshow under its own striped tent or umbrella.

Pounding its pavements, one can discover the wonders of hardware such as plugs, nails, wires and pails; environment-friendly potted plants, multicoloured human accessories like bangles, bands and shoelaces, which may even be luminous; and dummies parading the available fashions in front of clothes stalls.

You can munch on fresh popcorn from one sidestall or bite on perfect strawberries from another. Or you can patronise the roasted chestnut stand, several stalls away, as you savour the scene of the typical Malaysian pasar malam.

Before.....



..... And After

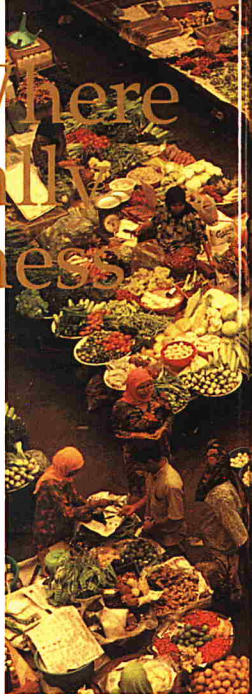


Kelantan-Where Women Really Mean Business

For the women of Kelantan, business comes naturally. Shrewd and enterprising, they play a major role in the economic development of the state through their ventures, which in many cases are family businesses handed down from mother to daughter.

BY HISHAM MAHZAN

Photography by Nik Ibrahim Salleh



CALL it women's emancipation, call it a sense of independence or call it what you will - there is no doubt that most Kelantan women are just not inclined to watch the world go round from their kitchen window.

The spirit of commerce burns too strongly in them to submit to the rules of the norm and be ordinary housewives. Instead they prefer to venture outside the home and seize the business opportunities that lie before them.



Some may already have been blessed with wealth provided by their rich husbands or parents. But many say it is not so much the money as the challenge of making it that gives them the ultimate satisfaction in life.

Although the world of business has traditionally been considered a male domain, the businesswomen of Kelantan can teach their male counterparts a thing or two about the tricks of the trade.

To the women, it is not a question of rivalry between the sexes. Rather, their purpose in venturing into business is to fulfil what

they believe is their destiny and not surprisingly, most excel in their undertaking.

Perhaps the greatness of the legendary Che Siti Wan Kembang, a famous female Ruler of Kelantan in the 17th century, has inspired the women of Kelantan.

Islam too plays an important part. The religion does not forbid Muslim women from venturing in business. Indeed, the wife of Prophet Muhammad was herself a well-known businesswoman.

Thus propelled by the powerful combination of tradition and

religion, Kelantan's women have marched forcefully into the world of business to stay.

From remote villages to the towns, they have made their presence felt in activities ranging from the sale of fresh vegetables in market squares to exporting exotic batiks to many parts of the world.

Many have also ventured into more challenging business areas including the pharmaceutical, construction and manufacturing sectors.

Hardly any business premises in Kelantan is without women. Indeed, their absence can be con-



strued as an indication of a decline in the economy of the state.

Visitors to Kelantan, especially the men, are often amused when they learn they have to negotiate or bargain with women instead of men.

However, it would be a grave mistake to underestimate the ability of Kelantan businesswomen.

Behind a charming and friendly exterior lie a shrewd mind and sharp business acumen - natural characteristics of the businesswomen of Kelantan.

"She will allow you to feel as if you have managed to get the better of the bargain but rest assured that she has already decided what her profit margin would be," said Che Zainab Che Noh who has been in songket and batik manufacturing for more than two decades.

She said there is nothing wrong in women being active in business as long as their other responsibilities such as family duties are not neglected.

"My husband is supportive of my business efforts and my children are learning the trade, not out of compulsion but genuine desire," she added.

Che Zainab said her grandmother had been a source of encouragement for her active involvement in business.

Foreign tourists who visit the Buloh Kubu central market will not stop taking pictures of enterprising women clad in the simple baju kurung Kedah but adorned with gold and jewellery to denote their wealth, selling their wares.

Surrounded by multi-coloured agriculture produce, the women go about soliciting buyers in the local dialect or chattering among themselves, unperturbed by the sound of clicking cameras.

Even local visitors cannot help but admire the ability of these businesswomen whose creativity



in displaying their produce never fails to attract.

For Rita Sabarnum Ismail, 28, general manager of a construction company, her involvement in the industry came naturally to her.

"I have no fear about entering an industry that many regard as being highly competitive," she said.

Rita Sabarnum said she is following the footsteps of her mother who founded the company and is responsible for the establishment of many housing estates in Kelantan.

"It is not difficult to enter this line of business. I guess it is in the blood," she added.

Rita Sabarnum did her first housing project when she was only 18.

"My mother trusted me with the project and I did not fail her," she added.

However, despite her ability and confidence, she had to start from the bottom before being appointed to her present post.

"Mummy made me a clerk and slowly promoted me up the ranks before finally handing over the company to me after she was absolutely certain I was ready to take over," she said.

"I am a woman but that does not stop me from handling housing projects including being in charge of buying building materials and supervising the construction work."

Che Mas Othman, 63, the owner of a jewellery store, attributes her success to pure hard work and determination to succeed in life.


Lack of formal education and inability to read and write did not prove to be a handicap as she is blessed with a strong memory that can recall every detail of her daily business transactions.

With over 50 years of business experience, she can tell from the first impression whether she is dealing with a genuine businessperson or someone who is trying out his luck in this line.

Like most successful Kelantan businesswomen, she started small, selling jewellery, clothing and other merchandise via direct sale.

"There is nothing wrong for us women to be involved in business. The religion does not forbid this as long as we dress according to the Islamic dress code," she added.

Che Mas said she did not need a university degree or bank loan to start her business.

"My important assets are determination and trust. Having them helped me to develop over the years," she said. 



THE boy is yet unborn who can possibly retain in his memory such items as half-a-cent of *ketumbar*, one cent of *lada kering*, two cents of potatoes, half-a-cent of *mancis api*, a quarter cent of salt, one cent of *ikan bilis* and so on and so forth.

Besides the impossibility of remembering exactly some ten to twelve such items that I had been asked to buy, an additional reason for my failure to remember

Excerpt taken from a book titled "Memoirs Of A Menteri Besar – Early Days" written by former Negeri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Dr Mohamad Said. It tells of a rural life where things can cost in fractions of a cent, where the chief pleasure is to swim in the river or raid a fruit orchard and where values are rooted in age-old traditions and customs, meticulously observed

Memories of Times Gone By

Illustrations from "Kampong Boy" by Lat

them all was that I was in a mighty hurry to get back to the house to join the rest of the boys in swimming in the tributary of the Linggi River which bisected the 250-acre *sawah*.

We generally swam joyfully at a place where the river was at its widest and deepest, quite undeterred by the reported sighting of one or two small crocodiles further upstream.

I was taught to swim very early in my life by my cousin, Ahmad Lobak bin Haji Abdullah, the aforementioned adopted son of my aunt Khadijah and her husband, Dato' Laksamana Abdul Majid. He made me lie on a *pelampung*, which was a float hewn out of the trunk of a *pulai* tree, and paddle with my hands. In no time at all I was able to discard the *pelampung* and swim and dive on my own like a veritable duckling, which illustrates the well-known fact that a child eager to learn and to excel in any sport or skill can be trained to be a swimmer, a tennis player, a vio-





linist, a pianist and what have you at an age when other children are still clinging to their mother's apron strings.

During the fruit season, instead of swimming in the river we raided my grandmother's three-acre orchard at Kampung Solok, which by that time had become a deserted village as a result of its inhabitants wishing to live as near as possible to the newly-made laterite road linking Seremban with Linggi and Pengkalan Kempas.

In this deserted orchard, there was a profusion of durian, mangosteen, *langsats*, *duku*, *pulasan* and other fruit trees. We climbed the tall *duku* trees like overgrown monkeys and gorged ourselves on their fruits. Many fruits had been eaten by squirrels but there was enough left to satiate us. We split open any ripe durians that had fallen to the ground and greedily ate the delicious *ulas*.

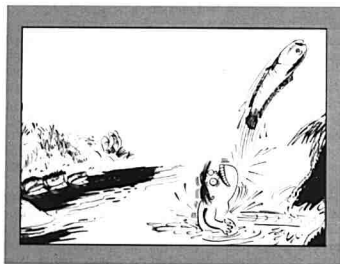
At the age of nine, I became the first of Wan Neng's pupils to successfully complete reading the whole Koran. It became necessary therefore that a *kenduri* (feast) should be held to celebrate my success and that the ceremony of *khatam Koran* or "The Completion of Koran-Reading" should be duly solemnised.

Early one morning, my mother shaved my head and asked me to crawl into the *reban ayam* (chicken coop) to catch a chicken for the purpose of making *rendang*, to form part of the customary gift of *pulut kuning* or saffroned glutinous rice, and *telur merah*, hardboiled eggs with red-coloured shells, to be presented to my Koran teacher, Wan Neng.

After the *kenduri* that night, I was dressed up in raiment similar to that of a bridegroom. This means that I had to wear a robe called *jubah* and headgear exactly like those worn by bridegrooms of the old days. I was "drummed" by a group of young men who were well-versed in Arabic songs. These songs were sung to the accompaniment of *rebana*, a form of Malay drum quite different from the *kompang* currently used to "drum" bridegrooms to the brides' houses.

On arrival at Sharifah Rogayah's house, I was welcomed by a smile-





ing Wan Neng, apparently proud of her achievement, having succeeded in teaching me to read the whole *Koran* at such a comparatively young age.

I was ushered into the *tengah rumah* where her mother, Sharifah Rogayah, and her sister Wan Teh, my grandmother, my mother, aunts and close relatives had already gathered.

I was asked by Wan Neng to read selected *surah* of the *Koran* to test my proficiency in reading them. Wan Neng expressed her approval of my pronunciation of certain difficult Arabic words and the fluency with which I read the selected passages before the assembled audience.

The yellow pulut rice, *rendang ayam* and *telur merah* were duly presented to Wan Neng and Wan Teh at the conclusion of the ceremony and I was "drummed" back to the ancestral home amid

the rejoicing of my mother and close relatives.

I have not so far described my school days in Linggi. As a matter of fact I was admitted to the Linggi Malay School at about the same time I began to learn *Koran*-reading as a pupil of Wan Neng and Wan Teh. It happened that my uncle Ibrahim, at the time of my admission to the school, had just succeeded his cousin, Ahmad bin Kapitan Ali alias Cikgu Nong, as headteacher after the latter had been appointed Penghulu of the administrative *mukim* (sub-district) of Linggi.



Incidentally Cikgu Nong was the headteacher under whom the late Pendita Za'aba had his primary education. At the same time, Pendita Za'aba was being taught *Nahw* (Arabic grammar) and elementary Arabic after school hours by Cikgu Abass bin Zakaria, one of the trio of *orang alim* or religious pundits in Linggi. The other two members of the trio were Tuan Haji Said bin Haji Jamaludin, the teacher of *Tarekat Ahmadiyah*, and my cousin Tuan Haji Mustapha bin Haji Ahmad.

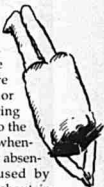
Cikgu Nong was a very good and very strict teacher and many anecdotes were told of the punishment he inflicted upon his truant pupils.

My uncle, one of the early graduates of the Teachers Training College, Malacca, was an equally able teacher in addition to being an amateur journalist. He contributed many letters and articles to the *Utusan Melayu*, *Lembaga Melaya* and *Pengasoh*. Those were the days of the *halal-haram* religious controversy and of earnest newspaper discussions on the subject of Malay poverty and backwardness, and the various remedial measures proposed to alleviate them.

Furthermore, he was even more hot-tempered than his elder brother,

Mohamad, who was then head-teacher at the Temiang Malay School, Seremban. It was characteristic of him that no one would dare to address him whenever he was seen to walk with his eyes focused on his toes. If so addressed he would invariably flare up and tell the man or woman who was daring enough to do so to go to the devil, as it were. And whenever there were many absentees from school caused by heavy rain he would shout inconsequentially: "*Cabutkan bendera Tuan Resident!*" (i.e. "Pull down the flag of the British Resident!").

He would at the same time



hurl a cylindrical ebony ruler in any direction he fancied, not with the idea of injuring any boy who had braved the downpour of rain to attend school, but simply out of pure cussedness and exasperation.

I remember very vividly the morning when a cousin of his, Yek Memah, came to the school to inform him that a son of hers was down with fever and was therefore unable to attend school. My uncle was then in one of his blackest moods and he shouted at her, "*Nyah pergi! Nyah pergi!*" ("Go away! Go away!").

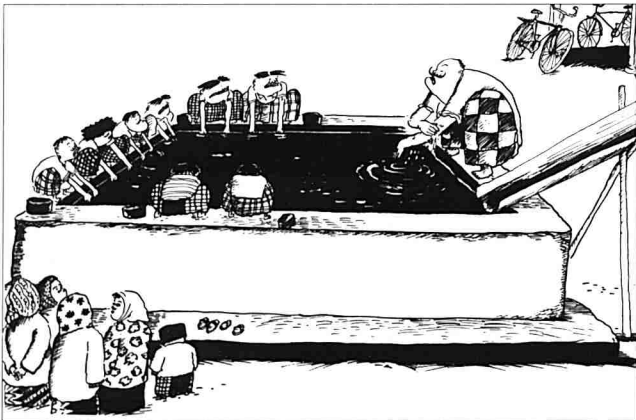
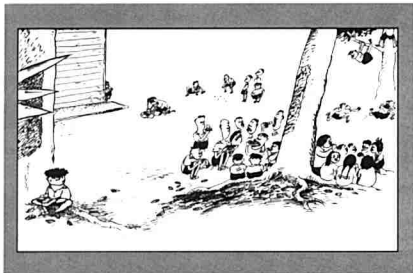
As I was a new boy, I was taught by Cikgu Yassin, a Rembau man. He was apparently a very sick man, for besides being very pale, he had a sore mouth and was constantly salivating and wiping his saliva with a dirty old rag. His poor state of health made him very gloomy and

irritable and a new pupil could learn practically nothing from him. With the hindsight of a doctor, I think that the disease he was suffering from was what is known as Tropical Sprue.

He had a ten-year-old sister-in-law called Loyah, whom the older boys teased and tormented endlessly for speaking Malay in the Rembau (i.e. Minangkabau) way. Loyah must have suffered a great deal of humiliation from being subjected to this daily teasing and jeering. She took care afterwards to do the shopping chores assigned to her by her sister, Cikgu Yassin's wife, only after school hours, although the Chinese shopkeeper took some time to understand her peculiar dialect.

Cikgu Yassin soon became too ill to teach and he was replaced by Cikgu Wahid, who was not only a much better teacher but had a mild temperament which made him very well liked by the boys.

Having learnt to recognise the Arabic alphabet from my late fa-





ther in his attempts to teach me to read the *jus amma*, I soon learnt to read and write *Jawi*.

As there were many *hikayat* (romances) and *syair* (verses/poems) in the ancestral home, I took to reading them without any prompting from anyone.

I first listened intently to my mother while she read aloud in the sing-song manner the *hikayat* and *syair* were read in those days. Having a good memory for words, phrases and sentences, I had no difficulty whatsoever afterwards in reading the particular *hikayat* or *syair* that my mother had been reading. Thus it was that I read and re-read with precocious avidity the many *hikayat* and *syair* available to me at home, and others that I could beg, borrow or steal from close relatives.

Another well-known teller of folk-tales was Cik Zainab, a widow of Datuk Kelana Syed Abdul Rahman, who lived in a house near the Linggi Malay School. There, too, we used to *bertandang tidur* in order to listen with rapt attention to her repertoire of folk tales. □



Tan Sri Datuk Dr Mohamad Said, P.M.N., D.S.N.S., D.P.N.S., P.P.T., was the Menteri Besar of Negeri Sembilan for two terms in the 1960s. Born in Kampong Tengah, Linggi, Negeri Sembilan, on October 31 1907, he started his career in medicine after graduating from the King Edward VII College of Medicine, Singapore. He served 23 years as a government doctor and retired from government service in 1955 to enter politics which he quit in 1969. The excerpt from his book was reproduced with the kind permission of Longman Malaysia Sdn Bhd.



Sungai Pendang today, tamed by the implementation of the Muda Irrigation Scheme

The River

Born and raised in a village called Tanah Merah on the bank of Sungai Pendang, a tributary of the Sungai Kedah, the writer remembers the river well. But like most things in his village, which he left 25 years ago, the river too has changed. He recalls living by the river as a teenager in the fifties and sixties

STORY AND PICTURES BY A. KADIR JASIN

THE river was once a mighty highway. Even during a lull in traffic its surface was alive with motion and colour. In its rapid, and sometimes violent, flow there was beauty and romance.

It was the only means of communication and provided a livelihood to many a boatman. More than this, it was a generous provider to those living in villages clustered along its banks.

The *nipah* swamps and the reeds on its banks were the spawning grounds for a variety of fish, freshwater prawns or *udang galah* and eels. The *nipah* palms and the reeds themselves were a source of income.

The *nipah* leaves were made into attap for roofing

and the *nipah* sap produced the tasty *nira* that could be consumed in its liquid form or turned into sugar. The reeds, known as *menerung*, were processed into ropes.

During the rainy season, the river overflowed its banks to flood the grassland, padi fields, rubber smallholdings and villages, sending snakes, monitor lizards, otters and rats scrambling for high ground.

Very often they ended up as unwelcome guests around the house. Built on stilts and on higher ground, our timber and attap house became the natural refuge for the fleeing creatures.

Occasionally they became desperate enough to climb onto the house to escape the water and predators among them. Many a time, we had to kill or remove snakes from our house.

The poisonous ones like cobras and pit vipers would invariably be killed. Pit vipers, as their name suggests, are ground snakes. They would climb onto the house only when driven by water. Cobras, on the other hand, are natural climbers although they too spend much on their time on the ground.

The *ular sawa* or pythons were despised and would be killed on sight for their constant forays into the chicken coop. It was not uncommon for a large python, measuring up to 10 metres, to attack and swallow a whole goat.

In one of those unfortunate occasions when Man and nature came into conflict, and with unwelcome results, my aged grandmother was bitten by a fairly large cobra when she dug into a *guri*, a small earthen jar, in which she stored rice. The cobra had taken refuge in the warm, dry place.

The snake slithered away and my grandmother, groaning in pain and saying she would die, was rushed to the hospital in Alor Star, 26 km away. She was given an injection of anti-venom, which ironically is produced by poisonous snakes themselves, and survived. She died of natural causes at the age of 90 in 1982.

The non-venomous varieties like the *ular daun* or leaf snake, so named by the villagers for its green colour and its habitation of trees and hedges, and the *ular tikus* or rat snake are frequent visitors to our house. The former feeds on frogs and birds while the latter is an effective rats and mice hunter, hence the name *ular tikus*. *Tikus* is Bahasa Malaysia for rat or mouse.

In later years, the rat snakes and related species were deliberately bred and released into oil palm plantations along with barn owls to control the mice population.

In the first few days of the flood, when the river flowed swiftly, the villagers would lose flocks of ducks and geese and herds of buffaloes which were washed downstream. But they were seldom worried. The ducks, geese and buffaloes were good swimmers, and the villagers would invariably recover their "floating assets."

This would take place



soon after the floodwaters started receding. Word would travel upstream to inform who downstream had the ducks, geese and buffaloes in their custody. No frantic search, only the laborious process of identifying which ducks, geese and buffaloes belonged to whom.

The information was exchanged and passed around among the men at the local coffee shops where they converged for a cup of *kopi susu*, the thick local coffee with lots and lots of sweetened condensed milk and sugar, a game of *mahjong* or *pakau* or a try of luck at the illegal four-digit lottery.

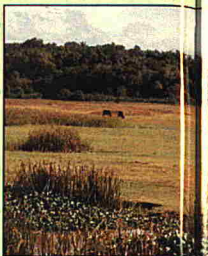
The Chinese *kedai kopi* would invariably have two sections: the front and visible section for eating and drinking coffee or tea and the hidden back portion for a little bit of illegal gambling and consumption of beer and stout.

The women on the other hand exchanged information at weddings or religious classes, and much later at the *kelas dewasa*, the adult classes held to teach the illiterates to read and write.



The town of Tanah Merah in Pendang District

Farming has encroached into state-owned pasture land



The river that gave them life also bound them together. There was a strong spirit of community among them.

Floods were also the time to fish and hunt. Liberated from the confines of the river, the fish swam to the bank edges in search of worms and insects. A variety of methods were employed to catch the different kinds of fish. Nets, hooks, spears and traps were widely used.

As a teenager, I often placed fishing above studying. Paradise came to earth when the rainy season coincided with the school holidays. I would spend hours, day and night, catching fish.

I would use anything from hooks and lines to spears, nets and *bubu*, a cage-like trap made of bamboo and net. To catch the *haruan* (striped snakehead), I would use large hooks with live bait, usually frogs and small fish.

It was common to land a *haruan* three to four kilos in weight. With the river free of pollution and with abundant spawning grounds, fish and *udang galah* were plentiful and grew to their full size.

The first rain would always bring the spawning fish rushing for the breeding grounds. They would swim up the natural streams or any channel created by the rain, very much like salmon that would jump the rapids, to get to their spawning grounds.

In their hurry to respond to their biological clock, they became easy prey for hunters, Man and animal alike. They could literally be scooped up using the simplest of tools.

The water birds were also plentiful. Driven by the rising water, they congregated on unflooded high grounds, making them easy targets for hunters. They could be caught using nets and home-made glue. The speediest and most effective method was of course by shooting them with shotguns.

Several people in the village owned shotguns, which they inherited from the disbanded Home Guard Unit. The Home Guard was established in villages during the emergency (1948-60) to guard against communist terrorists.

But the use of guns soon proved to be counter-productive for the villagers. With too many guns being used, the bird population soon dwindled. Frightened, fewer birds, especially the migratory species, were attracted to the river banks and the grazing fields.

My grandfather, who said he was an elephant shooter in his younger days in Perak, was an expert at handling shotguns. But his preferred method of catching birds was the *tebah*.

A *penebah* is made up of a net wrapped around a circular rattan or metal frame with a long bamboo

handle. The method was applicable only at night when the birds were asleep. As a rule, water birds spend the night on the ground and are most inactive on rainy nights.

We would choose the rainy nights to go on our hunting trips. Armed with a powerful torchlight, we would select the types of birds we liked best. We would pick several types at a time. On a good night, we would bag 15 to 20 birds.

But this was not without its perils. We had to travel quite a distance in the rain, wading through flooded streams and fields, to get to where the birds were. Sometimes we would return empty-handed, except for leeches that clung to our skin until they filled their bodies with our blood.

I am not talking about the inch-long variety commonly found in damp places in Fraser's Hill and Cameron Highlands. I am referring to the *lintah kerbau* or buffalo leeches that could grow up to six or seven inches. They were called *lintah kerbau* because they generally fed on buffalo blood.

Bitten by even a small one you would bleed for hours because the leeches had very powerful suction and injected in their victims an anti-coagulant to prevent the blood from clotting.

The effective way of removing them was to apply salt or tobacco. Bitten often enough, a victim developed resistance to the anti-coagulant injected by the leeches and the wounds would dry up quickly. But the itchiness would remain for several days.

The river that gave so generously during the rainy season also took away precious lives. Each year, many lives were lost to the river. Children and adults drowned when they were swept away by the current or when the sampans they were travelling in capsized.

But these tragedies were quickly forgotten and the relationship between Man and the river resumed. The *hantu air*, the evil spirit the villagers believed lived in the whirlpools in the river, was blamed for the deaths. The river remained faultless.

It changed dramatically in the dry season. Its usually murky colour turned blue as the tide brought in the seawater for tens of kilometres upstream. The water turned brackish, causing a considerable problem to the villagers who depended on the river for their water supply.

The dry season, which prior to the construction of the Muda Irrigation Scheme in the 60s lasted



several months from November or December, was the time when Man and animals were most dependent on the river. With wells, streams and the swamps running dry, the river became the sole source of water. Piped water did not come to our village until the 70s.

In the bad years, the upper reaches of the river dried up completely, forcing the villagers to dig deep wells in its bed or travel long distances on bicycles and bullock carts in search of water.

Up to the 60s, the river was also an important means of transportation. The wooden sampans and the larger *tongkangs* were widely used to ferry people and goods.

The best *tongkang* rowers were Chinese. This could be because the larger and more expensive *tongkangs* belonged to the Chinese traders. One of the best in our village was Ah Hin, who later became a Muslim and took the name of Ibrahim and married a Malay woman.

He was a good friend of our family and I liked him a lot. He often took me on his Hercules bicycle to Pendang, five km away from our village, for a movie or *bangsawan*. For a while my father paid him to ferry me and my sister to the Malay school in Pendang and back.

Ah Hin would row his *tongkang* downstream to Alor Star laden with padi and return with foodstuff, household goods and building materials.

For long distance and fast travelling on the river, motorboats were used. But they were considered a luxury and used only sparingly for occasions such as attending weddings and taking the sick to the hospital in Alor Star.

By the late 50s, the use of motorboats and *tongkangs* started to decline when a laterite road was constructed linking our village with Pendang, Tokai and Langgar, and onward to Alor Star.

This was following by the introduction of "prewet" or privately operated passenger cars. My grandfather was among the operators, first using an Austin A-40 and later a Woresley. Both were British

made. By the early 60s, a regular bus service was introduced by Mara.

The death blow was delivered to the river when a barrage was built a few kilometres up the estuary of Sungai Kedah to stop the seawater from coming in, thus ending the effect of the tides on the river.

Only occasionally would the barrage be opened to allow excess water to flow out to the sea. Stagnation resulted in large-scale siltation and caused much of the river to be covered by reeds and floating plants like hyacinths and water-lilies.

Since water from the padi fields was emptied into it, undissolved chemical fertilisers, herbicides and insecticides used by the farmers in their double-cropping of padi poisoned the river as well.

Only in recent years, thanks partly to the more regulated use of chemicals by the farmers, and the abundant rainfall, did the once proud and productive river slowly recover.

The *haruan*, *keli* (catfish), *puyu* (climbing perch) and *sepat* (snakeskin gouramy) are breeding again though not to their former size. The clearing of the *nipah* swamps and construction of embankment to control the flow of the river have deprived the fish of ideal spawning grounds.

The water birds, except for the *ruak-ruak* (white-breasted water-hen) and some migratory species,

have almost disappeared. Deprived of breeding grounds and poisoned by agricultural chemicals, their recovery is still uncertain.

The river had witnessed much: the birth, the marriage, the death, all the comings and goings, all the sorrows, the joys and the labour. To the villagers, the river was closely woven into their everyday life.

But with the economy and the lifestyles of the people, who once depended on it, changing, the

river is unlikely to reclaim its former status. It is no longer alive with crafts and a few old villagers, whose patient eyes watch life indolently from the water's brink, still wonder why this is so.

For me, having been born, nourished and raised on its bank, the river will always have a place in my heart. To paraphrase a remark made by British colonial administrator Hugh Clifford in 1898, my eye is abundantly filled with seeing.



The old Pendang town—still unchanged

A

lonely kite soaring high in the sky, its movements at the mercy of the wind; a top spinning on the ground, its life measured out by the number of its revolutions; shadows leaping about on the wall as if acting out a drama of their own - these are the games children play.

In Malaysia, such games are no child's play; they are the serious business of adults and elevated to the level of performing arts put on for an audience.

Kite-flying is a traditional pastime in the east coast states. Competitions are often held, with whole villages turning out to support their local champion. Judging is based on flight, handling skill and design.

For their construction, principles of aerodynamics and aesthetics combine to form sleek, heavily decorated giant kites made of bamboo and paper. Often a bow-shaped device is attached to produce a high-pitched humming sound. A popular design, the "Wau Bulan", has been chosen as the logo for the national carrier, Malaysia Airlines.

In top-spinning, the top is about the size of a dinner plate and may weigh over five kilos. Handling it is an art requiring dexterity, skill and strength. Once the top is launched, it is scooped up with a thin wooden bat and transferred onto a steel plate on a wooden post. An expert can make a top spin for hours, the epitome of perfect balance, skill and craftsmanship.

Top spinning contests are often held after the rice harvest and the champion spinner becomes the village hero.

Dancing shadows flickering across a lamplit screen indicate a Wayang Kulit puppet show in progress. The genius behind it is the Tok Dalang or Master Puppeteer.

Moving about figures crafted from buffalo hide and mounted on bamboo sticks, he narrates a story about the characters they represent, sometimes to the accompaniment of music. Wayang Kulit plays are based on romantic tales and classical Hindu epics.

Varying in size and shape as well as sound, drums are played as a form of performing art by the three major races in the country. Beaten by the hands, palms, fingers or sticks, the drums set the beat to their respective cultures.





Games People Play

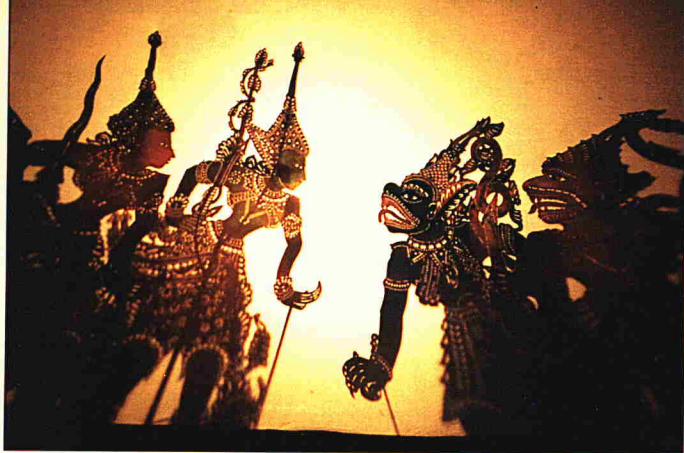
Photography by Suhaimi Hj Idris, Suhaimi Ahmad,
Roslan Khamis, Ikram Ismail, Samri Mohamad

















Giving Life to the Dead

Museums are said to be dead places showing lifeless objects. Not any more. They are now breaking with tradition and coming alive with revolutionary new concepts. A museum visit will no longer be a passive affair but a hands-on experience with the visitor directly involved in the activities.

BY NIK ABDUL RASHID BIN NIK ABDUL MAJID

Photography by Rosh Hj Nor

Maritime Museum, housed in a Portuguese galleon



A memorial building in Malacca

UPON arrival at any international airport, port-of-call or the gateway to a country, one will be able to pick up, free of charge, an array of brochures or literature with the salutation "WELCOME TO" naming the country of destination.

Without fail, each and every pamphlet will give a brief description of the country, followed by various captions: "Where To Stay", "What To Eat", "What To Buy", "What To Do And Where" and under the general heading "Places Of Interest" the captions "What To See" and "Where To Go" describing in some detail the places where tourists should go to and spend their leisure hours and of course, their money.

Most, if not all, places of interest are classified into various categories - Museums, Monuments, Memorials, Art Galleries, Historical Buildings, Archives, etc. Whatever we call them, they are muse-

ums of some sort.

But "Places Of Interest" are very subjective by nature. A museum may be appealing to some, but not all tourists. A monument may be a place of interest to some but not to all. An art gallery may attract only art lovers but not a sportsman.

A building may be an allocution to architects but not to other travellers. A beach may be an entreaty to sun-bathers but not to shoppers. A shopping paradise may lure credit-card holders but not budget travellers with little cash to spare. The list is endless.

Among the places of interest, a museum is a place where tourists, domestic or foreign, will ask for further details: What museum? What artifacts does it have? How old is the museum? Anything interesting to see? What exhibitions do they have?

Such questions are never addressed to a zoo, presumably because zoos are zoos. Only when a zoo has an exotic and rare animal such as the panda will the zoo

management put up a special promotion.

Of the two - museum and zoo - there are more repeat visitors to zoos because a zoo is full of life but a museum is lifeless. Children of course would like to visit the zoo four times a year while one visit to a museum is enough to last a decade.

Museums are dead. Visitors come to see an array of lifeless artifacts, arranged in historical chronological order, solemnly placed in showcases or boxes, interrupted only with explanations in all sorts of languages by the tourist guides.

"A picture is worth a thousand words

An artifact is worth ten thousand words

A museum artifact is worth a million words"

Museums are lifeless. For that reason, different races give different names to the museum. In Malay, it is called *Sekolah Gambar*, literally translated as "School of Pictures" or "Pictorial School."



The famous A Famosa

PHOTO BY AZLAN NAIN

The Arabs call it *Darul Athar* or house of antiques or *Mathaf*. The Japanese call it *Hakubutsukan*, the Koreans, *Bakmulgwan*....

Call it what they will, one thing is common. A museum is immobile, still, motionless. It is a place where they keep dead things. A new concept is currently under study to give life to the museum.

One has to have an interest in something before one decides to come and pay a visit to the museum. To exploit that individual and personal interest, there must be a number of museums - enough to cater to individual needs.

Having only one or two museums is tantamount to neglecting a great number of potential visitors. A sportsman, for example, would like to visit a Sports Museum (the collection for the Malacca Sports Museum should be ready in time for the 1998 Commonwealth Games) rather than a

Science Museum or the Art Gallery, unless he is also interested in art. An architect or landscape artist would be pleased to take photographs of buildings or famous landscapes without having to go and see what the inside of the building looks like.

To make museums lively places, presentation techniques using facilities such as multimedia presentation, computers, video films, slides and living mannequins are to be used in museums that will be built in the future.

The performing arts should be part and parcel of museum presentation wherever possible. For example, in the context of Malacca, the historic visit by Admiral Cheng Ho could be dramatized in full colour and splendour at the Cultural Museum.

Next, museologists must provide a host of choices of museums and give life to each and every one. Then only can museums

be declared a Place Of Interest.

As far as possible, museums should be located near each other. The concept should be a kind of one-stop attraction, so that the visitor can take a stroll from one museum to another.

Too much spreading will discourage museum hopping by visitors.

Furthermore, a common ticket at a discount rate should be offered to visitors to encourage them to visit as many museums as possible. A RM2 ticket for one entry should be given a discount of 50 percent, that is, RM10 for 10 museums.

Research work for the respective museums should be an ongoing process. Seminars, workshops and conventions should be held periodically. For example, Muzium Sastera Melaka (Literature Museum) has a theatre and conference facilities for the use of the public in the development of literary works.

Malacca - The State of Museums

Although Malacca is small and lacking in natural resources compared with its neighbours, Malacca has a strong advantage - its history, its past glory and its name, "Malacca", which itself is saleable and marketable to tourists.

With proper planning, the Malacca tourism industry will really flourish. Malacca's greatest asset lies in its historical and cultural attractions. Nearly a hundred historical places have been identified as places of interest.

The Malaysian government, in acknowledging the fact that Malacca has all the tourism potential, has set aside a sum of RM15 million under the Sixth Malaysia Plan 1991-1995 to rehabilitate and restore old buildings in Malacca to their former glory, a sum equivalent to one-third of the restoration budget for the whole country.

On April 15 1989, Prime Minister Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad declared Malacca the "Melaka Bandaraya Sejarah" or "Malacca Historical City" to give a new soul and impetus to the hospitality industry.

With this, the number of museums grew from three to 11 within a period of five years from 1989.

The number of tourists to Malacca steadily grew from one million in 1991 to 1.2 million in 1992, with another two million day-visitors, for a total of 3.2 million visitors a year. The figure for 1994 is expected to double that of 1990 due to the second round of the Visit Malaysia Year 1994.

Certain major factors have contributed to the increasing number of visitors to Malacca. They are the name Malacca itself, which is full of glory and rich in history, while the location - mid-



Looking into Hang Tuah's well



Cultural Museum Malacca - built in accordance with Malacca's Sultan's palace

way between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore and only a few hours from either - is another favourable factor.

The curiosity of foreign tourists to find out more about Malacca, its history and culture, and about the Baba and Nyonya, Chetty and Portuguese communities who are found only in Malacca, is also responsible for the growing inflow of visitors.

In fact, the whole state itself is a museum, a Living Museum. The Malacca state government in efforts to promote tourism through

ecomuseum has dubbed Malacca the State of Museums.

This is based not so much on the number of museums but the number of buildings identified to be of historical significance and included in the Inventory of National Heritage which is a comprehensive National Register of Old Buildings under the Antiquities Act 1976 (Act 168).

All buildings in Kompleks Warisan Melaka along Jalan Kota, Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock, Jalan Hang Jebat and some buildings in Jalan Laksamana and Jalan



Melaka's rich historical heritage attracts a growing number of tourists each year

PHOTO BY AZLAN NAIN



Portrayal of the epic fight between Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat

Bendahara have been gazetted under the Antiquities Act 1976 as National Heritage, and will be conserved and preserved.

In addition, some old buildings found in Alor Gajah, Jasin, Masjid Tanah and Peringgit which were built during the last century and the beginning of this century will also be conserved and preserved.

Kompleks Warisan Melaka will be re-enacted through a time-tunnel at an estimated cost of RM300 million. The state government approved the project in principle in July 1994.

Taking advantage of its rich historical endowment by exploiting its famed historical past, the state will be able to offer more as a tourist destination - a must for tourists to visit under the new concept of Living Museum.

Preservation Of Historical Sites

Historical sites must be preserved at whatever cost. Perhaps it is a wise move to reconsider the decision to demolish Stadium Merdeka to make way for a new township, for it is where the shout of "Merdeka!" was heard during the Proclamation of Indepen-

dence of the Federation of Malaya from the British colonial masters.

The traditional role of museums - to collect, preserve and display artifacts of historical value - is maintained but with a bigger and much wider scope. Museums now have a bigger and heavier responsibility to society than before.

Traditionally, museums are used as centres for educational resources, as recreational centres, as places to promote civic pride and nationalism, and in some countries, to transmit ideologies and ideological concepts.

Today, museums are also used as attractions to tap the tourist dollar, as a means to enrich the culture through cross-culture and as a means of contributing to the quality of life.

They are used as an endeavour to help society overcome youth problems by introducing productive, healthy and meaningful activities through programmes of active participation rather than passive on-lookers.

The setting up of future museums will be based on a different concept - location, environment, ecology, accessibility, development potential and social integration, presentation technol-

ogy and creativity will all be taken into account.

The Forestry Museum will be located in the Air Keroh Forest Reserve. The Weapons Museum will be in Kampung Duyong, where Hang Tuah's well is located. The Museum of Architecture, Museum of Landscape Architecture and the Museum of Malay Handicraft are to be located in Kampung Gelam. The Maritime Museum is now located at the mouth of the Malacca River. Next to it will be the Museum of the Royal Malaysian Navy (Muzium TLDM).

These projects have been approved by the state government.

The usual way of visiting a museum is to look around, watch, observe, browse through the non-living objects, or "look look see" as it is called locally. Such an activity is passive, dull and boring.

To make a visit interesting, a new concept has been developed - "active participation" by the visitors, giving a new twist to an old routine. The idea is to participate, join in, get the feeling, be part of it.

The Museum Building

Instead of a typical building to house the collection of artifacts, the shape and form of the building should reflect the concept of the museum it represents.

To illustrate, the Maritime Museum in Malacca took the form of a Portuguese Galleon - built to scale - in order to give life to it. Similarly, with Muzium Budaya (Cultural Museum) which is designed after the 14th century Malay sultanate palace.

Such an approach has been proven to be successful to the extent that the museum has to stay open till late at night.

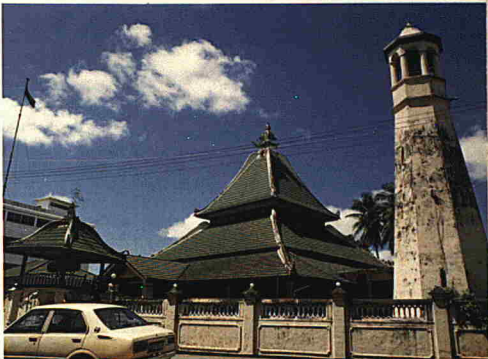
Instead of having standard showcases lined up against the wall, large scale diorama should be created to break the monotony, and with proper light and sound techniques, the whole scenario will become lively.

The Landscaping

The landscape factor must also be considered in locating any museum to enable tourists to take photographs from different angles.

Corporatisation And Privatisation

To make their wedding more exciting and memorable, a newly-wed couple would not mind spending a few hundred ringgit more to get married in a ceremony dating back to the glory days of



Kampong Hulu Mosque

Parameswara.

The ecomuseum of Kampung Gelam through Pengantin Baru Sdn Bhd, a would-be subsidiary of the Malacca Museums Corporation (Perzim), will offer this traditional package from A to Z, that is, from the engagement ceremony through the *aqad nikah* and ending up with the honeymoon. Even the invitation cards and the marriage certificate will be handwritten in the 14th century Jawi script of the Malay language, and the marriage ceremony will use the Munshi Abdullah style of Malay Literature grammar and vocabulary.

Although the marriage ceremony goes back to the days of Tun Fatimah or Tun Teja or Puteri Hang Li Po, it will be complemented by 20th century videos, photographs, closed circuit television, etc. This is unavoidable for recording purposes.

Hang Tuah Village

Situated some seven km away from the city, Kampung Duyong - reportedly the village where Hang Tuah and other famous Malay warriors such as Hang Jebat, Hang Kasturi, Hang Lekir and Hang Lekiu once lived - is a place to watch in the future. The Malacca state government has approved the development of Kampung Duyong as a Living Museum.

The whole concept of the ecomuseum will be introduced in the village where besides the Weaponry Museum, traditional Malay art and craft in weapon-making will be projected as an industry producing the *keris*, *pedang*, *tombak*, *lembing*, *badik* and others.

The village will have an array of traditional motels and chalets, restaurants offering traditional food (no burger, hot dogs or colas) served by traditionally

*The Stadhuys,
an example of Dutch
architecture*



clad waiters and waitresses. The waiters will wear the *tanjak*, *sampin*, *bengkong* and *capal*, with the *keris* tucked in the waistband and waitresses, the *kebaya*, *sarong* and *gelang kaki* complete with *regalia*.

A visitor will be able to spend the night in a completely 14th century atmosphere, travel in a bullock-cart, cross the river by *lancar*, be guarded at night by a *bentara* and as the grand finale, pay homage to the "Sultan Melaka."

Botanical Museum

Imagine this future scene - going to the Botanical Museum, paying an entrance fee and eating whatever is available to the heart's content. The Botanical Museum will consist of exotic fruit orchards, vegetable plots, herbal plantation, ornamental flowers and rare endangered spices farm. Besides eating, visitors will also be able to enjoy recreational facilities such as jungle trekking, camping, picnicking, apart from the educational parties.

Culinary Museum

The Culinary Museum to be located in a fishing village near the sea will be an interesting feature in the new dimension of giving life to museums. It will feature an international restaurant and food stalls in a Food Court serving cross-cultural food for multinational tastebuds and consumed in multicultural fashion - using plain fingers, chopsticks or the fork and spoon, and served on *daun pisang* or *upih pinang* for *nasi lemak* or *nasi dagang* or skewered as Bar-B-Que meats or eaten raw Japanese style or direct from the hot plate.

Lessons in cooking, demonstrations on cooking, food carving, the art of serving food and diet classes for health-conscious people will be a daily affair.

People's Museum

Muzium Rakyat (People's Museum) will have an added dimension based on the concept of "museum of the people, by the people, for the people." It should be built entirely from public donations through selling of bricks costing RM1, RM5, RM10 or RM50 and marble slabs costing RM100-RM1,000 each, and also from donations, contributions and gifts. The main exhibit will be on the Rights and Duties of the people vis-a-vis the Rights and Duties of the government. The "Wheel of Rights" will focus on what is the right of the government and what is the duty of the public and vice-versa.

Muzium Rakyat will also focus on the various

roles of the government and people. In other words, it is a museum that focusses on the historical, economic, social and political development of Malacca and Malaysia.

The same concept would be used for the Ceramics Museum, Wear Museum and Museum of Numbers. In the Ceramics Museum for example, visitors will participate in the making of ceramic artifacts and bring them home. Those made by VIPs will become collector's items. Daily ceramic classes would be held for those interested.

The Art Gallery is another museum that will present a new dimension to the traditional concept of drawing, painting, sculpturing. Art instructors will be on hand to teach and guide visitors in the various forms of art and culture. Artists will be made available to visitors to paint their portraits and other subjects.

Supporting Factors

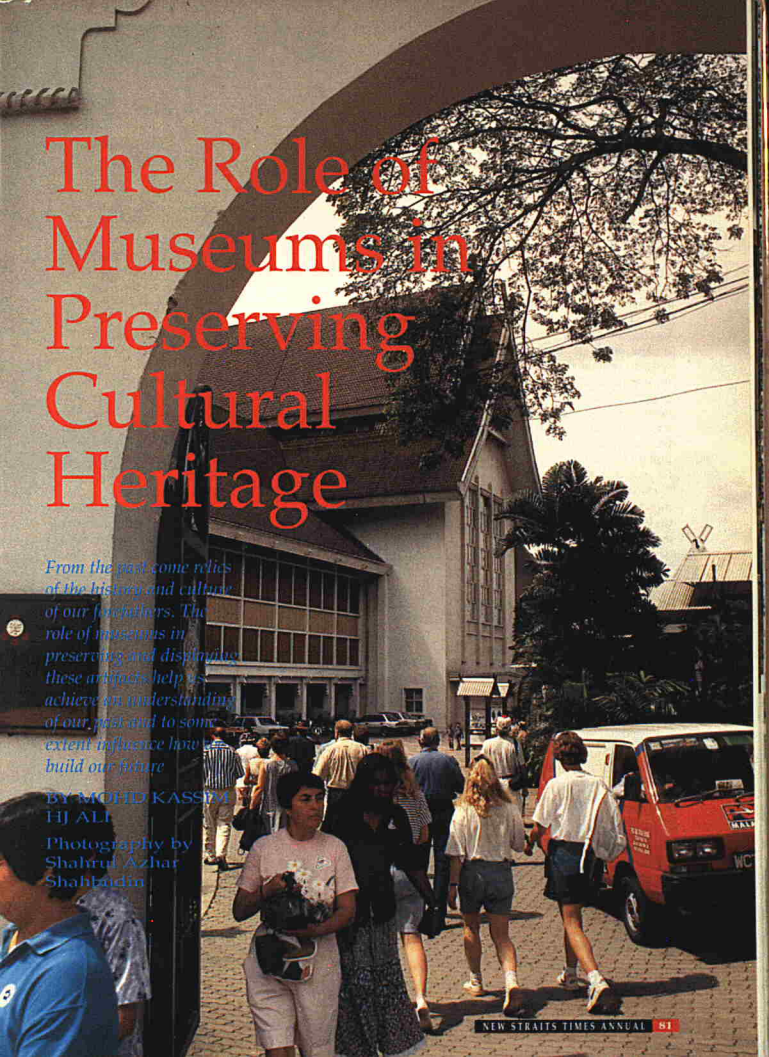
The importance of management must not be neglected. Public relations, promotion, marketing and advertisement deserve serious thought.

Exhibition

Ongoing and ever-changing exhibitions should be held regularly throughout the year. The exhibitions should coincide with an event. An example is the "Pameran Raja Kita" which has always been held on the day of the installation of the Yang di Pertuan Agong and lasts for about a month.

Conclusion

Life would be more interesting, more exciting, more meaningful and more memorable if we were to give new roles to the museum. Active participation is the watchword.



The Role of Museums in Preserving Cultural Heritage

From the past come relics of the history and culture of our forefathers. The role of museums in preserving and displaying these artifacts help us achieve an understanding of our past and to some extent influence how we build our future

BY MOHID KASSIM
HJ ALI

Photography by
Shahrul Azhar
Shahbuddin

The development of museums in Malaysia began in the last quarter of the 19th century. The first museum was established in Taiping, Perak, in 1883 with Leonard Wray as the first curator. When the need later arose for a more comprehensive collection of artifacts, Kuala Lumpur was chosen as the location for a larger museum.

The Selangor Museum, as it came to be named, was launched in 1888 and the building completed in 1907. In 1910, both the Perak and Selangor Museums were amalgamated to form the Federated Malay States Museum under the administration of the Federated Malay States Museums Department. However, the two museums were separated in 1930 under the British government's decentralisation programme.

The Selangor Museum carried

out extensive zoological work focussing on Malayan insects, mammals, birds, reptiles and fishes, adding to these its exhibits of local prehistoric and ethnographic objects. Apart from its three exhibition galleries, the museum also housed a library.

Disaster struck on March 10 1945 when accidental bombing by the Allied Forces destroyed the main building and ruined a considerable amount of precious artifacts. Those salvaged were temporarily housed at the Taiping Museum pending efforts to rebuild the museum.

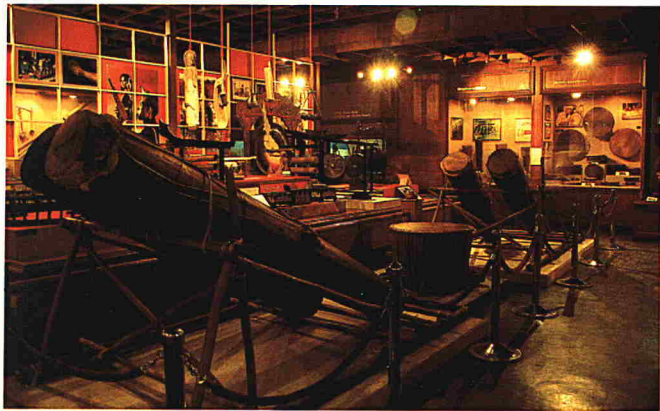
From that time until 1952, Kuala Lumpur had no museum. A small single-storied building was erected on the old site on the instructions of the High Commissioner, the late General Sir Gerald Templer, who officially opened it on February 11 1953. It remained the only place in Kuala Lumpur for the display of national trea-

sures and minor exhibitions until 1959, when it was demolished to make way for the new National Museum.

The initiative came from Tun-ku Abdul Rahman, the country's first Prime Minister. He saw the urgent need for a National Museum to preserve the rich historical and cultural heritage of the country and commissioned an architect to prepare plans for a proper museum building.

The new building constructed just outside the entrance to the famed Kuala Lumpur Lake Gardens, incorporating traditional Malaysian design and motifs, was officially opened on August 13 1963 by the third Yang diPertuan Agong, Tuanku Syed Putra Alhaj Idris almarhum Syed Hassan Jamalullail.

Muzium Negara is a three-storied structure with four permanent exhibition galleries. The ground floor houses the various





administrative offices, a library, photo library, storage area for its collection and several rooms to facilitate the preparation of displays for the galleries.

Objectives

Museums in Malaysia have always devoted their efforts to the preservation of our cultural heritage. In the midst of today's cultural innovation and social change, museums stand as repositories of tradition and heritage, giving physical form, as it were, to our collective memory by bringing together objects out of our past.

In general, the work of museums is to collect and preserve the past which generates culture, a function they have continued to fulfil and one that is directly linked to their place and task in society.

As we stand on the threshold of the 21st century, it seems appropriate to devote our energy and goals towards bequeathing the deposits of past and contemporary culture to the new and future generations. In this way, museums will have a share in determining the future.

It could also be said that the way we and our descendants continue building on our past depends to a great extent on what we know of the past. Therefore, what museum curators decide should be preserved would influence what the future will look like.

This is a very heavy responsibility, one that not many people are aware of. Some people regard museums as only repositories for the collection of memo-

ries.

There are over 50 museums in the country at present, managed by the Federal and state governments. There is also a growing number of private museums in the making.

The Federal government, through the Department of Museums and Antiquities, is determined to make Muzium Negara a base for conducting research, documentation and preservation and, above all, collecting and displaying the artifacts to the public. It has also sought to make the museum a focal point for education and a vehicle for dissemination of information pertaining to the country's rich history, culture and traditions and its equally varied natural heritage. The regular thematic temporary exhibitions held have helped promote tourism in Malaysia. Aggressive collecting, especially on material cultural objects and archaeological specimens from digs and research have generated growing interest.

The government and department have plans to establish more specialized museums, such as the Textile Museum, Ethnography Museum of the Malay World and Natural History Museum.

Among the many tasks given museum professionals is the preservation and restoration of about



619 known and identified buildings, some of which will be turned into historical complexes. To date, over 134 old buildings have been gazetted under the Antiquities Act of 1976, with the department empowered to preserve their entire historical and aesthetic values. Special attention is also given to the preservation of historical monuments - be it old forts, houses of prominent leaders or any private building of importance to this fast-growing nation of ours.

In the past, the tourism industry was not a priority of the government. Since 1990, however, special attention has been given to the industry as it could contribute to cultural revival and economic devel-

opment. Our cultural heritage has always been considered an important asset in the tourism industry; consequently the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism has been given the task of introducing and conducting tourism activities through its various departments. Towards this end, all aspects of the national culture including history and arts were exploited to the fullest, as a means of attracting more foreign visitors and investors to the country.

The government has provided a large allocation to upgrade historical buildings and beautify monuments, build cultural villages and create new museums. It also encourages cultural activities through various centres where traditional dances, games, pastimes and traditional handicraft are shown.

However, while we are all very anxious to make the tourism industry a success using our cultural heritage as part of the attraction, we must not forget the other roles of the Museums and Antiquities Department in upholding the authority invested in it by the government.

The Antiquities Act No. 168/1976 empowers the department with the control and preservation of and research into ancient and historical monuments, archaeological sites and remains. Above all, the Act empowers the department to check the movement of the country's treasures so they will not be brought out of the country.

Since its establishment in 1963, Muzium Negara has successfully conducted its policy to research and collect, and hold exhibitions on our cultural and historical heritage for the general public. Over 65 million visitors have passed through its doors and the number is increasing despite the recent introduction of a nominal admission fee. Records also show that between 200,000 and 250,000 foreign visitors a year come to the museum. This is a positive indication that the aims are being met.

Need and future role

There is still a need to develop public understanding of museums and museology in Malaysia. The demand from various sectors to establish different types of museums should be encouraged by the government and the museum community as a whole.

Each new generation needs to gain some insight into the roots, religion, philosophy, nature and other elements of their civilisation. A museum can provide at least some of the answers.

Museum curators and other museum professionals should concentrate on the museum's future goals. Initial planning should start now although the results will only be seen much later. A special task force should also be formed to design policies and



identify and rectify some of the major problems mentioned earlier.

Generally, museums in Malaysia are not recognised by the general public as centres of learning. This may be due to misinterpretation of the functions of a museum. Such museum "illiteracy" should be resolved by adopting the following strategies:

- conducting training seminars or workshops for all museum professionals and those interested in museum activities
- giving special lectures to all curators and senior level museum staff on the importance of stimulating the awareness of the general public through



educational activities

- designing museum educational programmes professionally, preferably along the lines adopted by museums in Europe and America

- training curators and other museum professionals in the role museums play in educational activities

- ensuring permanent exhibition galleries provide space for creative educational activities for children. The presentation of exhibitions should be more integrated in its approach

- educating the general public on the important role of museums in the dissemination of knowledge (not only in art, history and culture, but also across a wider spectrum of knowledge) through special exhibitions and other media

- encouraging volunteers to contribute their time towards developing museum educational activities

- coordinating closely with the Education Department and educational institutions in designing educational programmes for museums

- requesting a special annual budget to cover all the expenses incurred in mounting museum educational programmes

- requesting support from international institutions to implement museum educational programmes

Nevertheless, over the decades, much progress has been achieved through the able leadership of the Director-General and senior staff. Museums in Malaysia are gradually moving towards becoming "centres of education and public enlightenment."

To meet the challenges which lie ahead a museum will have to rely on professionalism among its staff, a good collection and a sound policy of education. Towards this aim, it is essential to encourage the participation of volunteers who find self-fulfillment in museum work and who have strong cultural and community interests. Future exhibition techniques and display methods should allow for more interaction between the visitor and the exhibits but the role of museums in education will remain.



Our Muzium Negara maintains a high standard and is able to get donors and contributors to financially support some of the exhibitions.

Undoubtedly, most museums in Malaysia face constraints in other areas of their responsibilities but educational programmes should not be neglected. It is felt that only through this type of public participation can Muzium Negara become well-respected by the community and recognised as a true centre of learning.

Malaysia is a multiracial, multilingual, multireligious and multicultural society. One of the most urgent tasks of the government of Malaysia is to help Malaysian youth find a national identity and to fight against racial polarisation through an understanding of cultures other than one's own. Through harmony alone unity prevails and only unity can guarantee national stability. Understanding of the need to preserve and appreciate our own cultural heritage will bring about a sense of tolerance and respect and thereby forge national unity.

Muzium Negara is one of the important government agencies entrusted with creating racial harmony and national stability and that is why each and every staff member takes his work of running the museum seriously. We have an important role to play in preserving our historical and cultural objects and at the same time, educating the people and visitors on the heritage of the past, for a knowledge of the past is of immense help in understanding the present and creating a beautiful future. Muzium Negara has that role to play.





How It All Started

One man's devotion to his duty turned a vision into reality. Others who came after him kept the tradition alive

BY MOHD KASSIM HJ ALI
Photography by Azlan Nain

THE idea of establishing a museum in the country was first mooted in the 1870s by Sir Hugh Low, the British Resident for Perak at that time. As Taiping was then the capital and centre of administration for the state, it was chosen as the site.

Leonard Wray Jr, a noted botanist and geologist, was appointed to set up the museum and collect specimens for display.

Wray's appointment provided him with limitless opportunities but he made collecting his first priority. A number of cultural and craft specimens from Perak and the surrounding districts were gathered and recorded with the intention of using the collections as exhibits in the new mu-

seum. By 1882, a blueprint was submitted to Sir Hugh for his attention.

However, due to financial constraints, the establishment of the museum could not be implemented at that time. Despite this setback, Wray remained committed to collecting, recording and gathering any useful object and specimens for the project. He acquired the use of two large rooms in the State Building to house his temporary museum and display the enormous collection which he had already amassed.

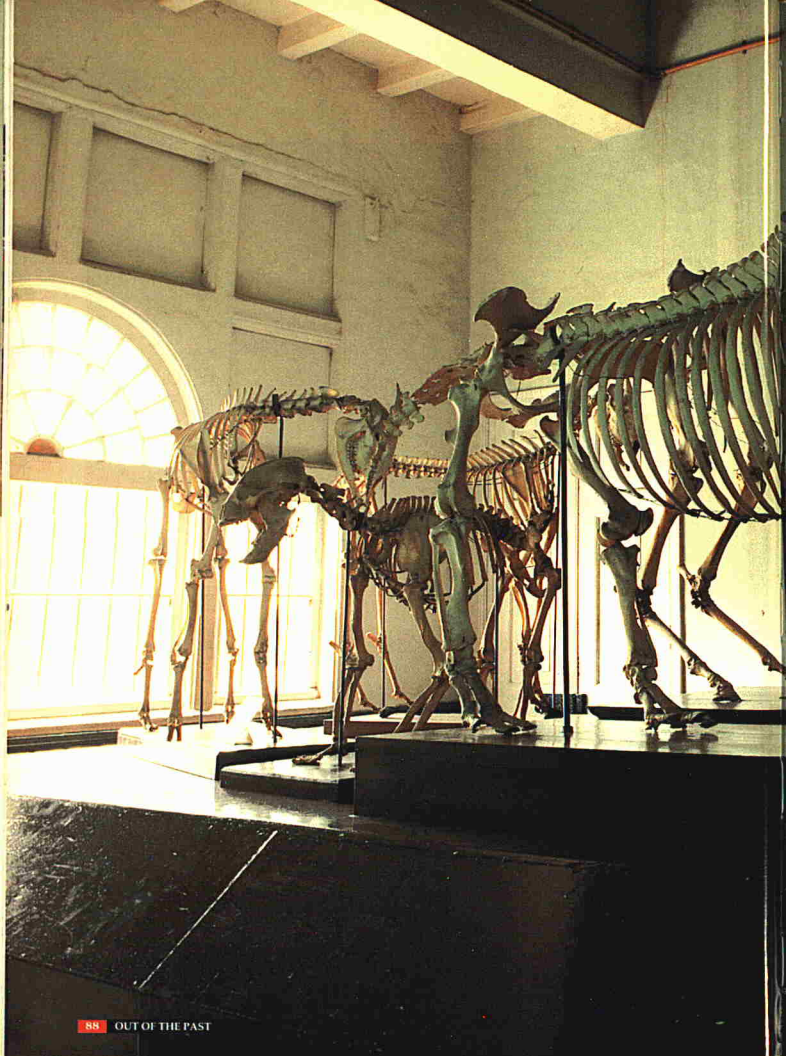
Working at his own pace and with limited funds, he named the premises the Perak State Museum. Work did not begin on the permanent building until 1883 when an architect from England was commissioned to design the museum which took three years to build.

There were four main galleries, a library and an administrative section big enough to house a curator and his staff. The four galleries were designed to house zoological, archaeological and ethnological exhibitions and a herbarium. By the time the new museum was opened in 1886, Wray had collected over 5,000 specimens, three-fifths of which were put on display while the rest were kept in storage for research purposes.

Research formed an important part of Wray's work and it is interesting to note that a close relationship developed between the museum and botanical gardens overseas which collaborated in the exchange of specimens and research, particularly the Royal Botanical Garden in Calcutta and Kew Gardens in England.

Botanical specimens were sent overseas for identification after which they were returned to the Perak Museum and displayed. Other institutions in close contact







with the Perak Museum were Raffles Museum in Singapore, the British Museum in London, and University Museums in Cambridge and Oxford whose researchers and experts also helped in identifying certain subject matter.

The objects selected for exhibition, which are still on display, were divided by categories into different galleries i.e. agricultural implements, gold jewellery and ornaments used by the Malays, costumes and traditional textiles of the Malays and various types of local traditional musical instruments.

Wray was also fortunate in having a good taxidermist on his staff who was able to mount specimens of any size. Consequently, the museum possessed a great number of mounted specimens of mammals and reptiles as well as skeletal specimens and those preserved in bottles for study purposes.



The pre-history collection on display had been gathered over the years in and around the state of Perak. The section of local history consists of various collections of weapons including the kris, short daggers, slashing weapons and parang as well as weapons confiscated during the Larut War.

All the exhibitions in the galleries are supported by explanatory photographs, graphic charts and line-drawn diagrams. These visual aids help illustrate the real functions of the exhibits. Photographs of the pre-historical specimens taken on site are more useful than lengthy labels or captions.

There is also a comparatively small but valuable collection of specimens gathered from China, India, the Arabian States, Japan, Fiji, Borneo and Thailand consisting mainly of ceramics, porcelain, numismatic items and weaponry.

A good selection of photographs illustrates the life of the various Orang Asli tribes throughout the peninsula.

A room houses a library containing mainly reference books and periodical journals collected over the years and covering a whole spectrum of subjects including anthropology, archaeology and natural history. As it was at one time the only library in the country, it was opened to the general public in 1954.

Since its opening, the museum's collection increased so rapidly it was necessary to request the state government to allot more funds for the extension of the building. The first of several extensions was made in 1888. A further extension to the front of the museum was made in 1889 and between 1891 and 1893, a new west wing was added. By



1900, a two-storey building was constructed, linked to the old building by a 35-foot corridor.

Although the museum building suffered no damage during the Second World War, it was later discovered that a large number of specimens were missing. Most were irreplaceable. Thus began a long process of organising expeditions and collection of specimens, excavation at historical sites being given top priority.

However, this work was greatly hampered during the post-war period by the presence



of the outlawed Communist movement in Perak, which prevented museum officers from moving freely in the state for research, excavation work and collecting. The situation persisted until 1960 when archaeological digs and field research began again. The museum also devoted efforts to replacing books lost during the war.

The next two decades were not good for the Perak Museum. Even after Malaya achieved Independence in 1957, progress was slow as funds were short and impor-

tance was attached to the establishment of a new museum in Kuala Lumpur. However, the Sixth Malaysia Plan has provided for the revitalisation of Perak Museum. Steps were taken to protect books in the library by installing air-conditioning. The most urgent task was to change the roof of the whole museum which leaked badly at some places to threaten the exhibits. The work was completed in May 1994.

The building also received a new coat of paint, restoring it to

its former glory and presenting a more attractive and conducive facade for visitors. Other plans on the drawing board include re-arranging the exhibitions with better showcases and well-researched informative labelling.

There are also plans to fence up the area and add extensions to house the office of the Perak Zone officers as well as a laboratory for conservation of objects. Hopefully, these plans will be realised by the beginning of 1996.





Sarawak museum
old building

A Wealth of Culture to Preserve

Can Sarawak's rich cultural legacy withstand the onslaught of modern progress to remain alive and flourishing? The Sarawak Museum is determined to see it does so.

BY PETER M. KEDIT
Photographs courtesy of
Sarawak Museum



Melanau sickness
image "Blum"

SINCE its establishment in the 1880s, Sarawak Museum has made preservation of the people's ethnic identity, traditions and cultural pride one of its main objectives. The more than 20 ethnic groups produce a rich cultural heritage that expresses their individual skills, creativity and indigenous lifestyles.

For example, the Iban "pua kumbu" are not merely intricately woven cotton blankets but expressions of legends, rituals and customs woven into tapestries. The Orang Ulu beads are regarded by the Kayan, Kenyah and Kelabit as important indicators of social status - possessors of certain types of beads in the old days enjoy better social standing in the community.

The Malays of Sarawak have beautiful wooden carvings that



Melanau women making sunhats (terendak)



Orang Ulu beaded baby carriers



Beads of wealth and status

adorn their stately houses, and their womenfolk weave intricately unique "kain sungkit" (golden thread cloth). The Bidayuh excel in bamboo carving and mat-making; the Penan are well-known for their "ajat" baskets and the Melanau for their unique "terendak" (hats) and baskets.

There are many traditional material cultures that are rich endowments of the people of Sarawak that can be found on display in the museum. Recently, these artefacts have been made more attractive and refined to cater for the growing tourist market.

Not only is Sarawak well endowed with material cultures it is also blessed with a rich legacy of historical sites, buildings and monuments. The most famous is the Great Niah Cave, where archaeological remains dating back some 30,000 years make it one of the most significant prehistoric sites in this region. The legacy of the White Rajahs remains prominent with its many structures built for defence (eg the many forts scattered throughout the state), administration (eg courthouse) and residence (eg Astana). Native monu-

A tradition is woven into the "pua kumbu" or Iban blanket





A craftsman at work on a native door

ments such as the "klirieng" pole (tall wooden mausoleum), and antique stone monuments such as rock carving and dolmens make all these a unique Sarawak cultural heritage.

However, with the passing of time, there is a danger of this rich cultural heritage not being able to withstand the attritions of modernity. There is increasing concern that if something is not done to prevent this from happening, the future generations will have hardly anything to inherit.

There is also the people's desire to see their heritage not only maintained but promoted to attract the tourist dollar. This is not to detract from their traditional pride in seeing their cultures intact and flourishing, so as to maintain their individual ethnic identities while being part of the modern multicultural society of Malaysia.

Given these considerations, the Sarawak state government



Penan "Ajat" basket

promulgated the Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance 1993.

The government agency entrusted with implementing the Ordinance is the Sarawak Museum. The Minister for Social Development through the Director of the Sarawak Museum is em-

powered to enforce the legal requirements - to preserve antiques and material cultures; and to conserve monuments, buildings and sites considered important Sarawak heritage.

Before the enactment of the Ordinance, there was the Antiq-

Ordinance (1958) but it was found inadequate to cover all aspects of cultural heritage. The 1958 Ordinance only covered antiquity, whereas the new law covers broader areas, namely, antiquities, historical sites, monuments and buildings, and traditional arts and handicrafts.

What is antiquity? Under the new Ordinance, antiquity is defined broadly to include all artefacts that are of historical, cultural or traditional significance to the people of Sarawak. Traditional arts and handicrafts also come under this definition. In addition, it covers any object considered to be 100 years old, whether of human, plant or animal remains or impressions.

With regard to the protection and preservation of historical sites, monuments and buildings, the following come under the ambit of the Ordinance:

- buildings and other structures built before the year 1940 which are of historical significance

- buildings, sites and other structures of special architectural, religious, artistic or cultural interest or beauty, and

- buildings that are closely associated or connected with a significant person or event in the history of the state

Once a site or building has been declared a historical monument, the owner or occupant cannot make alterations, additions or repairs; demolish or remove any part of the monument or conduct any archaeological works without the written permission of the museum director.

In the area of traditional arts and crafts, the Sarawak Museum

is entrusted with taking measures to preserve, develop and promote the indigenous material culture. This means that any work of art, craft, carving, handiwork or product derived from manual skill which is associated with or which depicts the culture, traditions, customs, way of life and history of the natives and various communities in Sarawak is protected



Museum staff at work around a Kitieng burial pole

under the new Ordinance.

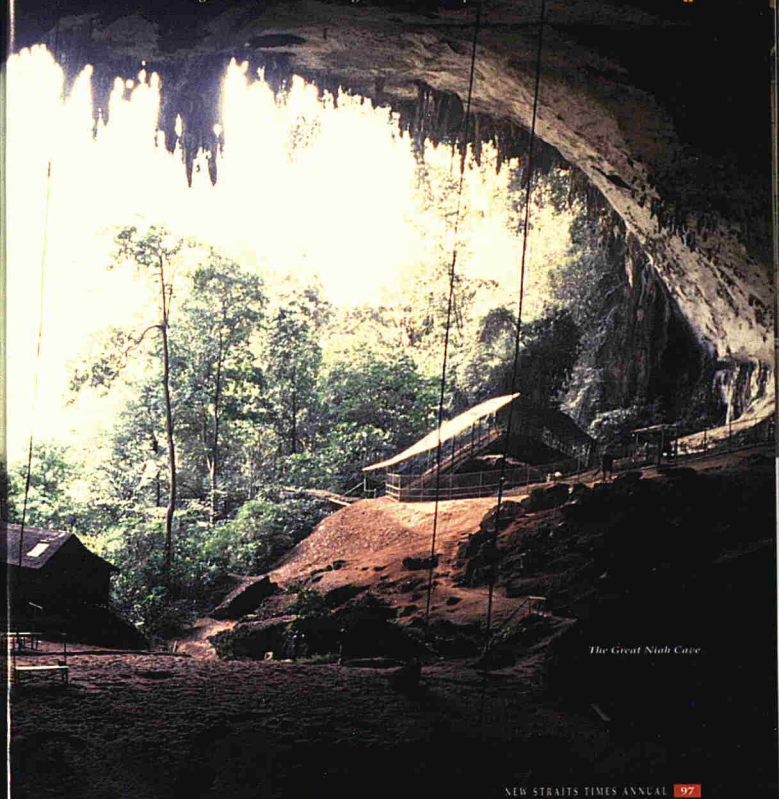
The museum will be undertaking programmes to stimulate and promote interest for the rehabilitation of skills in traditional arts and crafts.

Recognition and apprenticeship schemes are in the pipeline to locate master craftsmen who will be given grants, endowments or other forms of recognition to

encourage them to pass on their skills to the next generation.

In this way, it is hoped the Ordinance will ensure the perpetuation as well as vital preservation of traditional arts and handicrafts through the programmes of the Sarawak Museum. With the mandate given by the new Ordinance, the Sarawak Museum is geared towards help-

ing Malaysia preserve its rich cultural heritage. This role is not new for the museum, which has been at the forefront in not only collecting and displaying material culture, but also encouraging activities such as workshops in weaving, woodcarving and research projects that have contributed much to Sarawak's cultural scene. **U**



The Great Niah Cave

Malaysian Education from a Heritage Perspective

Education in Malaysia evolved from many different beginnings

BY AWANG HAD SALLEH

Photography by Kaharuddin Samad

FORMS of education in Malaya, known to the West then as Malacca and down the ages to the present Malaysia, are quite varied, consistent with the country's multiethnic composition and its location at the hub of the passage where trading activities began a long time ago and still take place today.

History tells us there had been Hindu colonies in the Malay Archipelago. There was a Hindu community in Bujang Valley in Kedah.

In the absence of historical records on education in those days, one can only speculate that

teaching and learning activities were informally conducted within the community and the system of apprenticeship must have already been in place then.

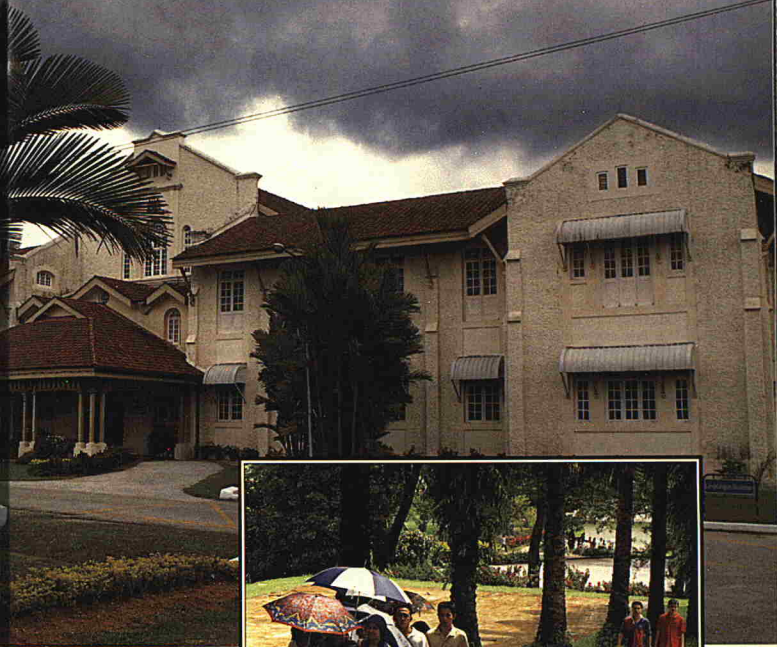
From the writings in Pali script, using the classical Javanese-Malayo language, which were found on tombstones in Palembang, Sumatra in Indonesia and believed to date back to the 7th century, to the inscriptions in Jawi script using the Malay language and found on a tombstone in Terengganu and a few places in Sumatra believed to date back to the 14th century, it can be deduced that different forms of writing systems had evolved.



Sultan Idris Training College - learning grounds for future teachers

There must have existed a system of scribes who passed on their writing skills to talented, skilful and younger learners. Although there were indications of a monastery in the region to which Buddhist monks came to learn, there was no evidence to show schools were in existence at that time.

With the coming of Islam to the region in the 13th century, courts became centres of Islamic learning activities by virtue of the presence of learned Islamic scholars there. Texts of Islamic religion or *kitab* were written and



then copied by scribes and passed on for limited distribution through further reproduction by other scribes. Teaching and learning activities were carried out in mosques and *suraus*.

By then, there had come to this country and indeed to the Malay Archipelago, Islamic education which seemed to have eliminated Hindu-influenced education. The West also came in a big way to the region in the 16th century. The big players were the Dutch, Portuguese, British and Spaniards.

Apart from the very limited exposure to the Por-



University undergraduates at their campus

tuguese and Dutch in Malacca (as a port), Malaya had been mainly under British rule for two centuries until Independence in 1957. In terms of education, the Dutch left a great impact in Indonesia, while the British left an equally great impact in this country.

Islamic tradition in education expanded. By the



School's over!

time the British came, in addition to the Islamic education taught in the *suraus* or at the homes of Quranic teachers, an Islamic institution called the *pondok* system was already in place, especially in the northern states of Malaya. Later in towns, *madrasah* and *maktab* were set up.

The *pondok* system was an orthodox form of learning where students would sit on the floor in a semi-circle formation called *haraqah* and faced the teacher. It was conducted in the teacher's house or a *sura* built next to it. The *madrasah* and *maktab* were modern systems where students would go to proper classrooms in a proper school building.

When the British arrived, they went about setting up schools. There were two groups responsible for starting modern Western education in the country. The first were missionaries who concentrated their efforts essentially in the Straits Settlements consisting of Penang, Malacca and Singapore and branched out to other parts of Malaya later. The second were British administrators.

The former group established mission schools catering for both primary and secondary levels of education. As a rule, scripture was one of the subjects in the school time-table. The latter meanwhile established government schools of many types. They were English medium primary and secondary schools and

Malay, Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools. By definition, vernacular schools are primary schools using the mother tongue - Malay, Chinese or Tamil.

Demographically, the Malay schools which were fully funded by the government were set up where the Malays were - largely in the rural areas. The Chinese schools were established at the initiative of the private sector Chinese communities and were found largely in the urban areas. The Tamil schools were the responsibility of the management of the estates - a requirement under the labour law then.

Students of architecture may find it interesting to note that school buildings for the different types of schools were of different architectural designs.

Pondok schools in the rural areas consisted of (a) the teacher's rather large wooden house, (b) another building next to the teacher's house where classes were conducted and prayer congregations held, (c) small units of hut-like students' make-shift houses surrounding the teacher's house and the teaching-learning building by the hundreds, depending on the size of the student population.

Madrasah schools would have a compound and building blocks, either single or double storey. They looked more or less like modern school buildings. They were largely single storey, built on a spot raised a little higher than the rest of the school compound.

It is also interesting to note that Malay school building designs were different, depending on whether they were in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore), the Federated Malay States (Selangor, Perak, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan) or the Unfederated Malay States (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Johor).

Tamil schools were less visible since they were in rubber estates. They were relatively



Learning never ends



An example of a pondok school set up in the past by the rural community

small due to their small enrolment.

Of the four streams of education by medium of instruction, proper training colleges were set up for only teachers for Malay vernacular schools. The first such college was established in Malacca in 1900, followed by one in Matang, Perak, in 1913. Both ceased operations in 1922 to give way to the newly established Sultan Idris Training College in Tanjung Malim, Perak.

The early missionaries and government administration paid great attention to the Malay language. With the introduction of printing, books of Malay classics were introduced using the Romanised system of Malay spelling. It was possible then to compile Malay dictionaries.

During the Japanese occupation of Malaya, education was suspended except where it would contribute to the Japanese propaganda machinery.

After the war, the British returned only to face the emergence of Malay nationalist movement followed by the communist insurgency. Self-governing status was granted to the country in 1955 which marked the beginning of great efforts to reconstruct the education system so as to reflect a truly national character. With the independence of the country in 1957, the Federation of Malay adopted the recommendations contained in the report of the Education Committee popularly referred to as the Razak Report after its chairman.

The national and official language of the country, the Malay language, was adopted as the main language medium of instruction for all schools except that at the primary level of education, national schools and the national type (Chinese or Tamil) schools were introduced. The latter were to be gradually converted to the former once there was a political readiness for this among the people.

In the mid-60s, the apex of the education system was reached with the creation of the first national university, University of Malaya (formerly known as University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, a sister university to University of Singapore established after the war). Currently, Malaysia has seven national universities and one international university.

Malaysia has placed great faith in education as the agent for (a) human resource development, (b) societal restructuring efforts to reflect equitable distribution of its wealth among the people, (c) promotion of knowledge and skills among the people at least up to the level of the ninth grade, better known nationally as Form Three, (d) revival of the Malay language as a medium of knowledge and science, (e)

socialization of its people in political democratic values, and (f) promotion of national unity and solidarity among the people.

Transmission of national cultural heritage is one approach greatly emphasised in education. Malay language and literature comprise one such heritage. Another is the teaching of the national history. Religion and moral education are taught in primary and

secondary schools with a view to instilling in students the finer points of Malaysian values, which are in themselves a heritage of great importance.

Now that the nation is geared towards achieving national goals as formulated under Vision 2020, it is vitally important for education to play a greater role in the promotion of the national heritage, both material and spiritual, both physical monuments on the land and cultural monuments in the minds of the people calling themselves Malaysians, so as to check any negative side-effects of modernisation and industrialisation.



T

HE period was in the early centuries A.D. The place was a valley set in the southern coastal plain of Kedah which possessed many qualities of a successful settlement. The soil was fertile for rice cultivation while nearby areas contained tin deposits.

The highest point was a mountain, Gunung Jerai, standing majestically close to the sea and serving as a landmark for incoming sailors from other lands to sail up a river and reach a settlement that had sprung up to function as a supply replenishment and trading centre. Somewhere inland a local polity or kingdom existed.

What were the inhabitants of the area like? They were Malays, socially well-organised and practising their religious beliefs. Like the Malays of Borobudur and elsewhere in Java, Sumatra and Bali, they were Hindus who had embraced the religion through contacts with Indian traders and learnt the Hindu-Buddhist arts from them, but also preserved their own culture and added new elements to it.

It is possible to reconstruct this picture of Bujang Valley in the 4th or 5th century through archaeology, the science that excavates and studies the debris of history and with painstaking probings replaces myths with reason and facts.

Bujang Valley has great historical, trade and cultural significance to the country. It is in this area that evidence of the earliest Malay kingdom, which existed even before the opening of Melaka, was reported and discovered. The discovery of the Palava inscription in Cherok Tokun in Bukit Mertajam, a Buddhagupta inscription in Sungai Mas and Bukit Meriam and the miniature inscriptions from Bukit Choras testify to the existence of an early Malay Kingdom in the Malay Peninsula within the political tholascracy of Srivijaya dating from the 4th to the 14th century.

Bujang Valley was also the site of a flourishing entrepot activity. Evidence points to the existence of two dominant trading or cosmopolitan centres that operated for almost eight centuries, namely the Bujang River area near Merbok and Sungai Mas in the Kuala Muda area.

In this respect, historians and archaeologists believe Bujang Valley

owed its development to the early maritime navigation network. At a time when ocean navigation relied on monsoon winds, the fact that traders had to call at the Malay Peninsula to wait out the monsoon contributed significantly to the rapid development of the international trading network in this region.

Geographically, the peninsula lies half-way between two major civilizations of Asia – China in the east and India and the Middle East to the west. It was therefore the best strategic place to stop and exchange goods while waiting for the monsoon to change direction.

Records on the antiquity of Bujang Valley come from two main sources: literary and archaeology.

Among the most important literature is the Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa or the Kedah Annals carrying legends of the opening of a new kingdom in Kedah known as Langkasuka which early historians thought to be in south Kedah where "shrine remains" were reported to have been discovered. Later historians placed the kingdom somewhere in Patani in south Thailand.

Digging Up the Past

Defined as the study of antiquity, archaeology throws light on the civilisations that preceded us so we can know and understand better the heritage of our past

BY ADI HAJI TAHA
Photographs Courtesy of Muzium Negara



LOCATION OF BUJANG VALLEY

The area has also been associated with another aspect of the annals, the legendary "Raja Bersiang", the king with fangs known for his passion for drinking human blood.

The story has lured many researchers into the area since the middle of the last century in search of the king's palace. There was no palace to be found but a number of remnants of small shrines or temples of Hindu/Buddhist origin. One researcher once wrote: "The abundance of the archaeological record is all the more astonishing when one thinks of what once must have been there."

Another important literary source was the writings of Chinese chroniclers, Arab geographers and Indian literary text. A Chinese pilgrim, I-Tsing, who stayed for six months in Palembang to study Buddhism and Sanskrit, wrote about the ex-



- Archaeological Sites
- Entrepot Centre

istence of a kingdom in Bujang Valley. In 671 A.D., he recorded that he had to sail from Palembang to Malayu and to Chieh-ch'a to catch a ship bound for Nalanda in India. A similar account was written by Wu-Shing in 685 A.D., who described Kedah by the name of Chieh-ch'a which has been identified as Bujang Valley.

Scholars too have come to believe that the Indian toponyms, Katalah, Kandaram and Kidaram mentioned in the Indian puranas refer to Bujang Valley. In fact the name "Bujang" was said to be derived from a Sanskrit word "Bhujangga" meaning serpent to reflect the winding nature of the Bujang River. Ibnu Sulaiman al-Masri, an Arab trader, mentioned Kedah as Quedah or Kalah.

However, the most significant evidence revealing the existence of an ancient kingdom and civilisation is through archaeological research. The discovery of the archaeological potential of Bujang Valley was first made by Colonel James Low, a British official in Penang, in the middle of the last century.

Commenting on this, he said he found "undoubted relics of a Hindoo colony, with ruins of temples." Other discoveries by Low included a

large stone boulder at the foot of Bukit Mertajam inscribed in Palava script and dated from the 4th to the 6th century, and a very significant Buddhagupta inscription dated as early as the 5th century.

Later in 1894 F.W. Irby of the Perak Trigonometrical Survey discovered the ruins of an ancient granite temple on the summit of Gunung Jerai. In the 1920s and 1930s, I.H. Evans, a Perak Museum official, visited Bujang Valley to investigate the existence of the Malay kingdom. His work has enriched the inventory of remnants of monuments and artefacts of the valley.

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Dr Quaritch-Wales and his wife undertook extensive research in the valley, unearthing more than 30 structural remains, most of which are of religious temples, and numerous artefacts.

After the war, researches into the antiquity and archaeology of Bujang Valley continued. Among the most important efforts were those carried out under the auspices of the University of Malaya by Dr Michael Sullivan in the mid-1950s and Dr Alistair Lamb in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The success story of Dr Lamb's excavation and reconstruction work left an impact in the later development of Bujang Valley. Lamb also

made a very important discovery that opened a new page in the interpretation of the archaeology of Bujang Valley and astounded him. He uncovered evidence indicating that the inhabitants' practise of Hinduism did not adhere strictly to the Indian version but was a unique South East Asian version.

Archaeological discoveries come in two main forms: structural remains in the form of building foundations and artefacts comprising religious



A Buddha image dating back to the 6th to 7th century.

objects and trade items.

The structural remains of Bujang Valley display varieties and uniqueness in architecture though they are comparatively small in dimension. Some of the structures are rectangular in shape, and some octagonal and twelve-pointed similar to the Greek cross.

The structures discovered are basically religious edifices or candi, belonging to two different categories. The first is the stupa which is associated with Mahayana Buddhism and the other is the vimana-mandapa devoted to the Hindu Siva cult. These buildings are located close to riverbanks.

Archaeological artefacts fall into four types: sculpture; inscription; trade ceramic; and earthenware and beads.

Of the four, inscriptions constitute the most important evidence in Bujang Valley. Among the first to be found was an inscribed slab bearing the votive stupa while the scripts were written in Sanskrit dated back as early as the 5th century. In Bukit Mertajam, the inscription en-



A religious edifice reconstructed on its original site behind the museum.



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graved on the stone boulder in the Palava language of South India contains the credos of a Buddhist formula which states that it was erected in commemoration of a successful voyage made by a great sea-captain named Buddhagupta.

Bujang Valley has now become the prime focus of archaeological research in the country. It was in the early 1970s that the Museums and Antiquities Department undertook serious efforts to excavate, reconstruct, preserve and develop archaeological sites in Bujang Valley for educational and cultural tourism.

The historical potential of the area coupled with its scenic beauty that features waterfalls and lush green forests provided a strong base for its development. A site museum was constructed by the department in 1977 so that objects excavated from Bujang Valley could be displayed in their proper environment and ecological context so as to help visitors understand better the significance of the findings. The museum was

officially opened by the Sultan of Kedah in 1980.

However, with the current increased tempo of research activities, the museum has proven to be inadequate. The department has plans to expand the gallery and increase public utilities, in keeping with its concept of making Bujang Valley a National Historical Park, the first of its kind in the country.

Perhaps Bujang Valley was the meeting place of vessels from the Middle East, India and China, a site where many goods were exchanged and relatively few were consumed locally. We know from Arab geographical texts that such a site existed - Kalah. If the site is equated with the Indian inscription of a place name Kataha or Kidaram, it must thus mark a region of great importance in the history of South East Asia.

There are a few reasons for the decline of Bujang Valley. According to historical records, Bujang Valley ceased to flourish fol-

lowing a massive attack by the Chola king of South India in the 14th century. However, another main factor for its decline is the siltation of both the Muda and the Bujang-Merbok rivers which made navigation more diffi-

cult. Some scholars suggest that the conversion of the rulers of Kedah to Islam affected the trading activities of Bujang Valley.

Though there are no great or gigantic monumental remains like Borobudur, the significance of the archaeological discoveries and of Bujang Valley in the region's historical, trade and cultural development is enormous. Malaysians should be proud to know that the area played a major role in the early trading network and became an international entrepot centre many centuries ago.





Salvage work in progress.

*Undiscovered treasures are lying beneath the sea or
ground, just waiting to be found, or are they?*

BY JOSEPH EDWIN
Photography by Ibrahim Jusoh

The Hunt for Lost Treasure





Ancient
map of the
Malay
Archipelago.

AS a little boy in the early 1970s, I was ruined by treasure maps, and Robert Louis Stevenson deserves some of the blame for writing *Treasure Island*.

I devoured the book. But more than that, I was smitten by the movie, the 1934 version with Wallace Beery as the all-time perfect Long John Silver.

Most days, I pretended to be a localised version of him. Instead of doing my chores or homework, I would spend all my free time at the belukar that stretched out behind the row of detached houses in old Petaling Jaya where I lived.

Here, I would clear the undergrowth with a rusty cangkol, in hopes of finding a tunnel or an underground cave that would lead me to piles and piles of glittering booty.

Over the years, I never quite relinquished the hope of stumbling upon a Japanese booty that would bring me instant fame and fortune, despite never finding anything more valuable than a tarnished coin of unknown origin.

Finding a lost treasure is every young boy's dream. Some, however, have turned their dream into a profitable profession.

Treasure hunters like Mel Fisher, Teddy Tucker and Rob McClung are constantly plying the world's oceans in their never-ending quest for sunken treasures. These salvors, some of whom have become millionaires overnight, continue to inspire the young, although there are people who dismiss them as no better than pirates.

Treasure hunting today is almost a national pastime in many parts of the world. In England in the summer, thousands of people can be seen walking around the countryside, clinging onto their metal detectors in hopes of unearthing valuable artifacts.



A lone diver surveying treasures from the deeps.

In Malaysia, however, apart from the occasional archaeological find - which is usually of no interest to the general public - treasure hunting is almost non-existent, and there is a good reason for it. Looking for treasure in this country is like trying to find a needle in a haystack; in this case, the needle may not even be there.

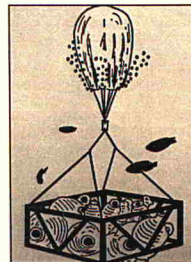
A local art historian puts it bluntly when he says that whatever national treasures that are to be found in the country are already in Muzium Negara.

Experts agree that in comparison to our Asian neighbours including Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, the Philippines and India, Malaysia is unfortunately not rich in antiquities. In all these years, apart from the few local earthenware pottery and some 11th-17th century Chinese porcelain, no one has ever reported unearthing national treasures of any significance.

Treasures, as we know, are however not confined to land. The same art historian concedes that shipwrecks may prove to be the



A Portuguese trading ship.



Salvaged artefacts are usually lifted by balloons.

only treasure trove of any significance to us. Even then, the numerous Asian trading ships that plied the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea from the 9th to the 17th century were loaded with cargoes that were not from this country, neither were the supplies intended for us.

Still, the recent recovery of some 23,000 pieces of Ching porcelain from the sunken British merchant vessel *Diana* off the coast of Malacca (1817) has appeared to confirm what many Malaysians have believed all along: that our seas are a veritable treasure trove that begs to be explored.

One person who has until recently pursued this path is commercial diver Stanley Yong, who claims to have located a wreck that may prove more valuable than the *Diana*. He believes he has found the exact spot off the Malacca-Johor coast in which the *Pacha* sank 143 years ago.

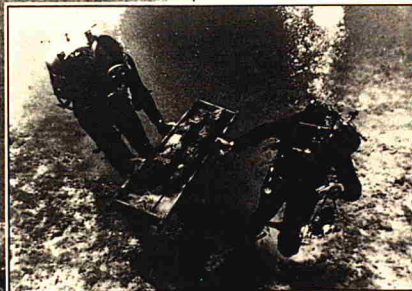
The *Pacha*, a steamship belonging to the Pacific & Orient (P & O) Company, is said to have collided with another vessel, the *Erin*, at about midnight on April 22 1851. Records show that 16 people on board the *Pacha*, including crew members, drowned.

The 600-tonne *Pacha's* principal cargo was opium, most of which would by now be damaged by sea water, but precious metals and stones also constituted a major part of its cargo. The manifest showed that it carried a box of silver coins, a box of undisclosed treasure, nine boxes of gold dust, 42 boxes of gold bars and leaves, a case of diamond rings and a case of silverware, enough stash to tempt even the most seasoned treasure hunter.

The amazing thing about the *Pacha* - now lying in water depths of about 60 metres - is that it is still intact, according to Yong, who is confident it can be brought up "in one piece."

Yong also claims to have located several other wrecks in the Malacca Straits and the South

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MUZIUM NEGARA



Bringing up the booty.



Some of the items recovered from the Diana.

China Sea in the last 15 years including the Dutch vessel *Risdam* (before it was located and salvaged) and the Portuguese ship *Flor de la Mar* which sank off Sumatra's coast in 1512. The *Flor de la Mar* was reputed to have carried a king's ransom; plunder from the Portuguese sack of the Malacca Sultanate, and the loot is said to include up to 20 tonnes of gold, precious stones and a large haul of valuable artifacts worth up to RM9 billion in current value.

Yong believes there are at least 93 wrecks of warships and seven historical vessels lying in Malaysian waters. Museum officials are more conservative in their estimate and place the number at 35.

However, in spite of his claims of successful surveys, Yong has now all but abandoned hope of salvaging the wrecks. The reason: his early experience in establishing a local underwater salvage company has left him bitter about the business.



Citing professional and personal differences among the partners, Yong left the now-defunct company and established his own business – offering underwater services such as civil engineering work, construction and blasting.

Today, Yong no longer believes in the pot of gold that lies at the end of the rainbow. Hard work, he says, is the only road to success. Others however, like his former partner Michael Hatcher who achieved fame for his recovery of the Nanking cargo valued at US\$15.3 million, are believed to be still in this region, surveying our waters for treasure.

To date, only one salvage company – Malaysia Historical Salvors – has been awarded a contract by the Federal government, to locate and subsequently salvage the Diana. Four other private salvage companies have been given permits to survey our seas for historical and war wrecks.

These salvors are now hard at work. But salvaging of sunken historical vessels itself has come under fire since the recovery of Diana's cargoes.

The authorities are concerned about the reckless way in which salvage work has been carried



Celadon plates.

out. According to Muzium Negara's Acting Director of Antiquities Paiman Keromo, more than 10 percent of the artifacts from the Diana were damaged due to careless handling. The actual monetary value of the damaged items, however, could be a lot more than just 10 percent of the total worth of the salvaged artifacts.

The authorities also suspect that some surveyors may have looted from wrecks which they have identified.

How did this happen? The problem is one of manpower, or rather the lack of it, says Paiman. But even if the authorities had enough staff, it would be virtu-



The Diana also yielded these valuable pieces.

ally impossible to monitor the surveys at all times.

While the authorities have been chastising salvage operators, critics have pointed out that the museum itself has been slow in initiating measures to rectify this problem.

Almost 10 years ago, experts at a seminar on ships and sunken treasure stressed the need to establish a Department of Underwater Archaeology. Muzium Negara responded positively when it was reported in a Malaysian business magazine in 1984 that the museum was planning to set up such a department.



Sorting out the find.

Some 23,000 pieces of Ching porcelain were recovered from the Diana.



However, until today, this plan has yet to materialise. Museum officials though recognise the need for such a department and hope it will be set up under the 7th Malaysia Plan which will come into effect in 1996.

To be fair, the museum has already taken several positive steps to curb abuses in salvaging sunken vessels. Several of its staff are in training for underwater work, but the authorities are not sure if they will be ready to completely take over the recovery of sunken historical wrecks in the near future.

Still, these divers will at least

This is no ordinary crockery.



be able to closely monitor the work of private salvage operators, and complement the work of expert divers from state museums.

The museum is also in the final stages of drafting specific guidelines for private salvage operators working on recovering sunken historical vessels. The Diana experience has highlighted the flaws in current laws that deal with the recovery of sunken treasures.

With advances and new developments in marine technology – such as the synthetic aperture radar – it may now be possible to locate more historical wrecks.

Former lawyer and University Malaya lecturer John Doraisamy says existing laws regarding treasure troves, antiquities and marine wrecks, were drafted for land-based antiquities and treasure trove. He argues that our laws need to be revised in the context of present-day requirements and trends.

These legislations lack the fundamental concept of "historic wrecks", an idea that made its appearance in the laws of the United Kingdom and Australia as early as in 1973.

Currently, the Antiquities Act 1976 is in the process of being amended to meet new demands and the Transport Ministry is upgrading the Merchant Shipping Ordinance 1952 to an Act.

Paiman says that in the light of more recent findings, it is imperative that amended legislation includes not just the sea but also other bodies of water such as lakes and rivers.

The recent discovery of what is believed to be an ancient chest and porcelain at the bottom of Lake Chini in Pahang by construction workers is one such instance. This find has stirred speculations of a sunken Khmer city at the bottom of the lake, much like the fabled Atlantis.

Museum officials have identified three spots in the lake as possible sites for investigation. They have also confirmed the existence of an underwater structure or monument, which is believed to be part of a building that has yet to be identified.

Perhaps in time to come, the authorities may be able to locate more than just a few pieces of crockery. Museum officials are always open to the idea that some of Malaysia's national treasures may yet turn up at sea or beneath the ground.



Forests hold the bulk of our heritage.

The Unrealised Heritage

Nature is our most valuable heritage and if more people realise this, we can maintain better the integrity of the environment which supports our continued existence on Earth

STORY AND PICTURES BY A. MUSTAFA BABJEE



PHOTO BY SALEH OSMAN

FEW of us realise how rich we are, in the natural assets we have inherited. Because we tend to measure our wealth in purely economic or materialistic terms, we miss the satisfaction and enjoyment of owning much more than what we have on paper or in our bank account.

Aren't we the rightful inheritors of the forests and their inhabitants, the waters and the living contents and the air we breathe and share with the flying creatures?

We guard and protect our material heritage (house, car, land,

money) with great care and jealousy because we know we own them. However it does not cross our mind that we are also the legal owners of nature and her wonders. There is no reason this natural heritage should not be cared for and protected as jealously as our material heritage. Perhaps because we are not fully conscious of our rightful ownership of nature and the environment, we tend to leave the care of such things to others, especially the government.

This detached and passive attitude towards the environment is changing but not fast enough to have the desired impact on

conservation and abatement of pollution. We hear more of our environment today than in the past, we see more interest and activist groups concerned about our rivers, air and forests and we note the greater attention of the government to all these issues.

But the majority of individuals are still insensitive and have failed to voice or act to prevent the loss of our natural heritage, be it a species of plant, animal, fish or the pollution of our air, land and water. The foetal awakening towards the care of our natural heritage must from now be continuously nurtured until

everyone feels responsible for the conservation of nature and the environment.

We are richer than we think. The birds that fly high in the sky are ours, the flowers that bloom on the trees are ours, the tigers that roam the forests are ours, the fishes that swim in the waters are ours and the billions of plants are also ours. We are truly rich. Unfortunately, because we can't measure this type of wealth, we pay less or no attention to its real value in relation to the quality of our life.

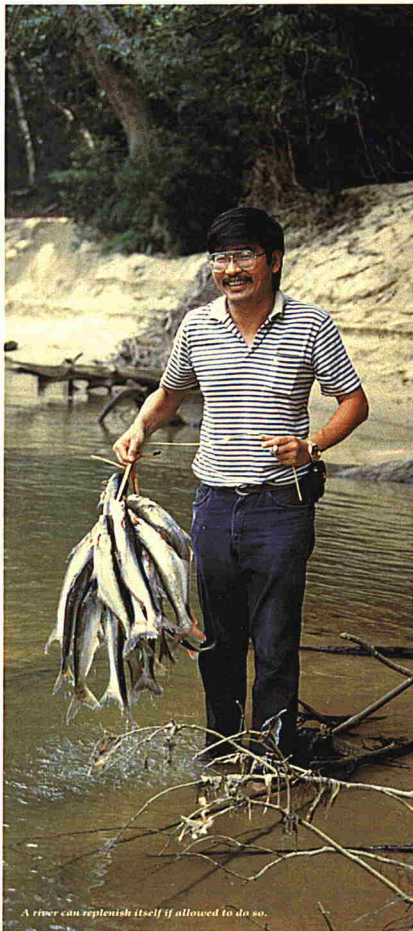
The other reason for our inability to appreciate the value of this kind of heritage is because of the collective ownership. No grants or shares are issued to individuals for such an inheritance. We pay less attention to it or we let others worry and look after it – the Malaysian Nature Society, Malaysian Environmental Protection Society, World Wildlife Fund.

The time for individual as well as collective responsibility for nature is overdue – no longer can any individual escape from this duty by passing the buck to others.

Human beings by nature desire to own things they are interested in. If people are not interested in the environment and nature, they would have no desire to own these. Consequently, they will not really care for what they perceive as not theirs to bother about.

People must therefore be converted to the cause through proper exposure to nature. Educational programmes through the mass media together with visits to nature sanctuaries have been found to be effective in bringing about appreciation of our natural heritage.

A financially rich person who cannot appreciate and enjoy the beauty and wonders of nature is actually a poor person. He is poor in hearing if he cannot appreciate the songs of birds, he is poor in vision if he cannot admire the vi-



A river can replenish itself if allowed to do so.

brant colours of flowers or fluttering butterflies, he is poor in his sense of smell if he cannot enjoy the freshness of the mountain air or sea breeze, he is poor in his sense of touch if he cannot marvel at the warmth of animals or the coolness of the scales of a floundering fish.

Richness that satisfies all the senses is true wealth. Nature can give us this. A poverty in the appreciation of nature means a lower quality of life for the individual. Absorb the richness from nature all around us and improve the quality of our lives.

Nature's invitation to enjoy and marvel in her beauty and mysteries remains perpetually open. Accept this invitation and you will never look back on your life again. She will open the door to a world of peace and tranquility – a balm for tired minds and stressful modern life. If there is violence in nature, it is for a good purpose.

Allow me to take you on a short journey of small discoveries in our immediate environment – a walk through the nearest belukar or a stroll around a disused mining pool. No city or town in Malaysia is too far away from such places. You might have already been jogging around such places on weekends, but this time alert all your senses and stop to absorb the total environment. We are going to see, smell, hear, feel and taste the environment and appreciate our heritage.

It is early morning. You walk towards the belukar in silence. Along the edges of the path, you note the countless pearly dew-drops clinging to the blades of grass and the leaves of little shrubs. Watch them vaporise when you pass the spot again on your way back.

Do you see the beauty in them, especially when the rays of the peeping sun refract and reflect from them? See the sensitive prickly mimosa instinctively fold her tiny leaves as you brush by,



A weaver bird's home.



Sun-loving lizard.

as if she is shy of you. The common flower of the roadside, the Straits Rhododendrum, seems to be still asleep, her delicate purple petals closed, waiting to open slowly when the sun is up.

Up the cherry tree at the fringe of the belukar, a pair of yellow vented bulbuls greet the morning with their continuous bubbling song. But earlier at the break of dawn, the black and white magpie had contributed her melodious tune to the concert of bird songs.

Further up the canopy of a tall fig tree, the small flock of pink-necked pigeons remain silent because of your presence. Their green feathers provide the perfect camouflage among the foliage. But if you hide yourself and remain silent, you will be entertained to their chuckling, bubbling, cooing and squeaking sounds.

What are those flask-shaped pendants hanging from the leaves of the isolated palm tree, you wonder. Soon, you will learn they are the homes of weaver birds, who live in colonies and who are great architects.

If you think all the birds are up in the trees, you will be pleasantly surprised when the white-breasted waterhen suddenly emerges from the tall grass and crosses your walking path in a hurry. There are more creatures in the grass that you missed that morning. Quails, maybe snipes, skinks and even a monitor lizard, not to mention all kinds of insects.

As the sun slowly warms the earth, take a breath of the aroma rising from the clean soil. Now the thin veil of mist shrouding the clumps of trees and shrubs begins to fade away, allowing more light to penetrate the leaves and branches. With the increasing brightness, the nocturnal creatures go into hiding and the sun-loving ones, especially squirrels, monkeys and agamid lizards, begin preparing for their daily routine.

What you have seen on your first casual outing is only a small portion of nature's offerings to someone interested in nature. The wonderful thing is that every time you make a visit, you will see something new. The secret of getting the full benefit from any trip to watch and feel nature is to remain still and silent at some vantage point and engage your mind's eye on the environment.

A visit to an abandoned mining pond overgrown with weeds, including within the area of Kuala Lumpur, should reveal a rich bird and animal life. The large pool in Sungai Besi close to the toll plaza is a haven for the purple coot, a permanent residence for bitterns and waterhens and a seasonal destination for the little grebe. Lizards, snakes, frogs, dragonflies, grasshoppers and snails abound in the area while in the water are a variety of fish. You do not need to travel far to get close to nature.

If you don't have the stomach for the rolling sea to go out and enjoy fishing, try inland angling in the lakes and rivers.

Once you feel the bite, tug and pull of the fish, you would have found a new clean excitement in life. The fishes in the sea, rivers and lakes are yours, so conserve them so that you can fish forever. Dynamite, poison, electric fishing, close-mesh net and trawling in shallow waters and pollution through our irresponsible ways have depleted this valuable resource. Angling by the rules of the sportsman is the right way of enjoying and conserving our aquatic heritage.

You and I can no longer watch and allow our natural heritage to be eroded by time and unsustainable development. We should not pass on the task of saving what we have left to others or interested groups or green bodies. Everyone should be interested in their heritage and take the responsibility of maintaining it for future generations.



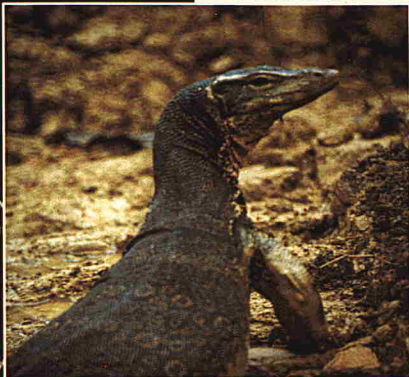


Audible but well-hidden.



Even in the jungle, it is possible to have a swinging life.

Keeping an eye out for food.



Millions of insects inhabit the Earth.

Too often we point the finger at others for the pollution problems and destruction of natural habitats. Let us look at our immediate environment and do something to improve it. Leading or showing by example is the most effective way of gaining converts to environmental consciousness.

There is so much cleaning up to be done in our country caused by solid, liquid and gaseous substances and unless all of us get involved, the situation will continue to deteriorate. Pollution has a direct influence on our natural heritage, be it forests, rivers, sea or air. The time to act positively as individuals as well as groups is now.

Progress is often perceived by the number of skyscrapers our towns or cities have. Thus New York or Tokyo is dubbed a great city, though we know that for a large number of the residents, life there is synonymous with misery. What quality of life can one expect in a concrete jungle where humans prey on other humans? Emphasis on material and monetary gains could obliterate moral and social values.

Malaysia's progress must be steered towards total quality of life where material, spiritual and aesthetic values are blended and balanced in the right proportion. Appreciation and care for the environment must be high on the priority list of our education system.

Careful examination will show that there is no gain without loss and no loss without gain, for all things are in equilibrium. To my mind, this philosophy is the key to right planning and development.

Make a hole in the ground and you create a mound nearby; drain water from a field and you'll fill up the nearest pond; remove a tree from the forest and a sapling takes its place, catch a garoupa and another fish grows to replace it. Well, if this is always the rule we should not worry about our

heritage and our environment. But the problem is that the equilibrium is extremely delicate - there is a threshold that must not be crossed to keep everything in balance.

We have to learn to recognise the threshold for the different activities, below which nature can look after herself, above which destruction begins. Let nature recycle and where human activities have exceeded the threshold, she will need a helping hand. A river with fishes will perpetually replenish itself if the fishing is by line or reel and rod or by traditional bamboo traps.


But when Man becomes greedy and uses unfair means to catch fish, nature will not be able to replenish the fish. Similarly with our forests, our wildlife, our water, our land and our air - if we do not exceed the thresholds for replenishment, recycling and self-cleaning, our heritage and environment will remain in a pristine condition.

The sad reality is that because of our wanton ways, we have exceeded the thresholds of nature's ability to help herself. Man must now intervene to help nature recycle and replenish. There is little doubt that we will lose a percent-

age of our natural heritage but it is not too late for us to play our part and keep what is left.

Technology has to be roped in to handle the solid, liquid and gaseous wastes that are suffocating our land, rivers and atmosphere. Machines and processes that separate the different types of wastes and recycle and clean them will have to be installed where necessary. This, however, should not excuse us from playing our important role of handling and reducing our own wastes.

Because the forests hold the bulk of our heritage and greatly influence our environment, serious measures to prevent further deterioration of the forests must be instituted. Parks and forest reserves must be defended from intruders, while commercial forests must be managed professionally for sustainable harvests.

Malaysia's future and the state of its environment will depend on what we do and don't do. If we succeed in getting practically everyone to feel that they have a stake in nature and the environment and that the natural heritage is really ours, we stand an even chance of preserving this unrealised heritage for generations to come. 



The magnificent seladang, a heritage in the forest.

Ponds and lakes harbour a variety of species.



The Life-Sustaining Forest

BY NORAINI SHARIFF
Photography by Saleh Osman

NST FILE PHOTO



The forest is also home to jungle dwellers like this Penan tribe.

The importance of the forest to Mankind is enormous. The complex interdependence of the forest ecosystem helps keep Nature in balance and its green fastness may hold the key to much of the cures for our diseases. Yet due to the economic value of its timber, its existence is being threatened by loggers who cannot see the forest for the trees.



*Nothing beats
long legs for
keeping dry.*



There is still so much more to know about the forest... Prof Ruth Kiew.

A rock arrayed in a mantle of lichen and moss.



Lord of the jungle.

MAN'S association with the forest is an ancient one that goes back to the time when homo sapiens first inhabited the planet. For Man, the forest has always been a provider of both sustenance and shelter. From it he sources food in the form of the meat of forest animals, fish from the rivers, honey from the bees, nuts and fruits from the trees. The forest gives him timber and non-timber products like wood, rattan and bamboo to build his dwelling, and fuelwood to feed his fire. Its extracts like latex, resin, gums and oils meet his other needs.

Forests also play other roles which, though invisible, are crucial to Man's survival in the world. They regulate the planet's rainfall and provide soil and watershed protection. Forests recycle nutrients and through the process of "inhaling" carbon dioxide and giving off oxygen, they prevent the greenhouse effect.

Their value, especially the tropical forests, is further enhanced by their being storehouses of biological diversity, home to a multitude of plants, animals and micro-organisms that form links in the world's biological chain.

Equally important is the forest's contribution to Man's spiritual development. For centuries, it has served as a source of inspiration to Man, stirring his imagination to give birth to great works of art and literature, ranging from paintings and poetry to myths and drama. A lot of cultural roots also go back to the forest, such as the use of forest products like the tongkat ali in traditional medicine. More recently, the forest is a source of economic wealth through its valuable timber and its role in the ecotourism industry.

However, despite its immense value, the forest is now a resource at risk owing to human encroachment such as land clearing work and exploitative logging.

Plant taxonomist Prof Dr Ruth Kiew is fearful human beings would be greedy and foolhardy enough to destroy the forest to fulfill their immediate desires at the expense of long-term needs.

In fact, a favourite phrase of hers on the subject is: "Man is not so clever that he can do God's work."

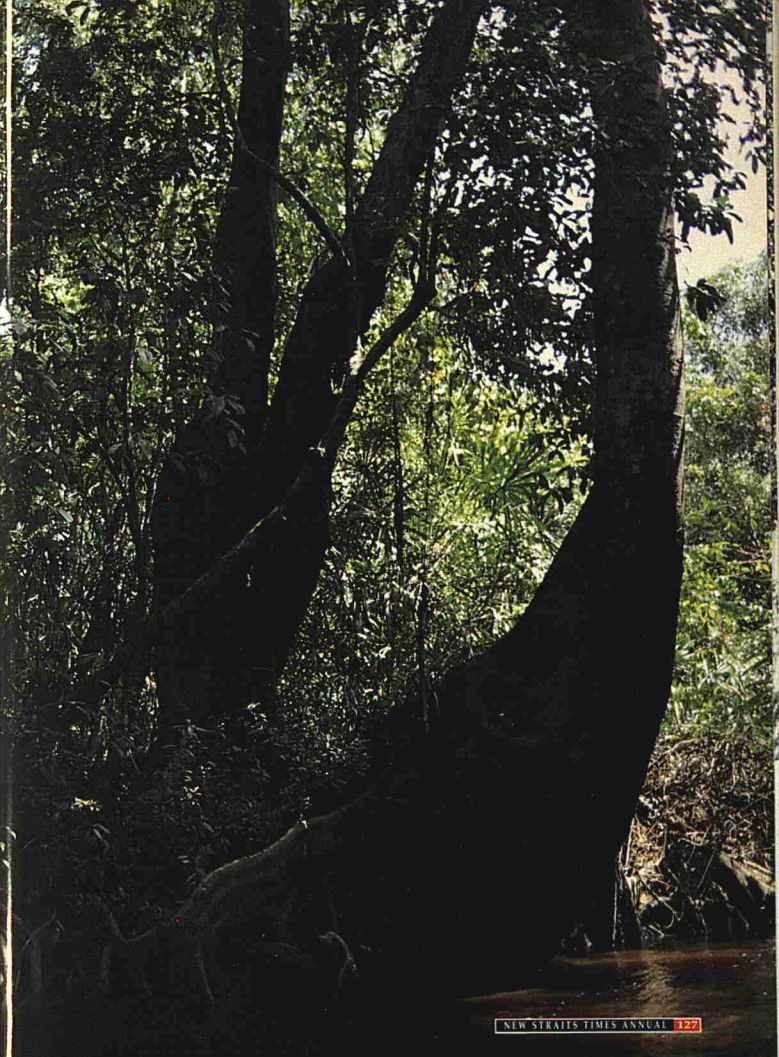
"We know so little about it and there is still so much more to be discovered, knowledge which may be vital to Man either immediately or in the future," Kiew said.

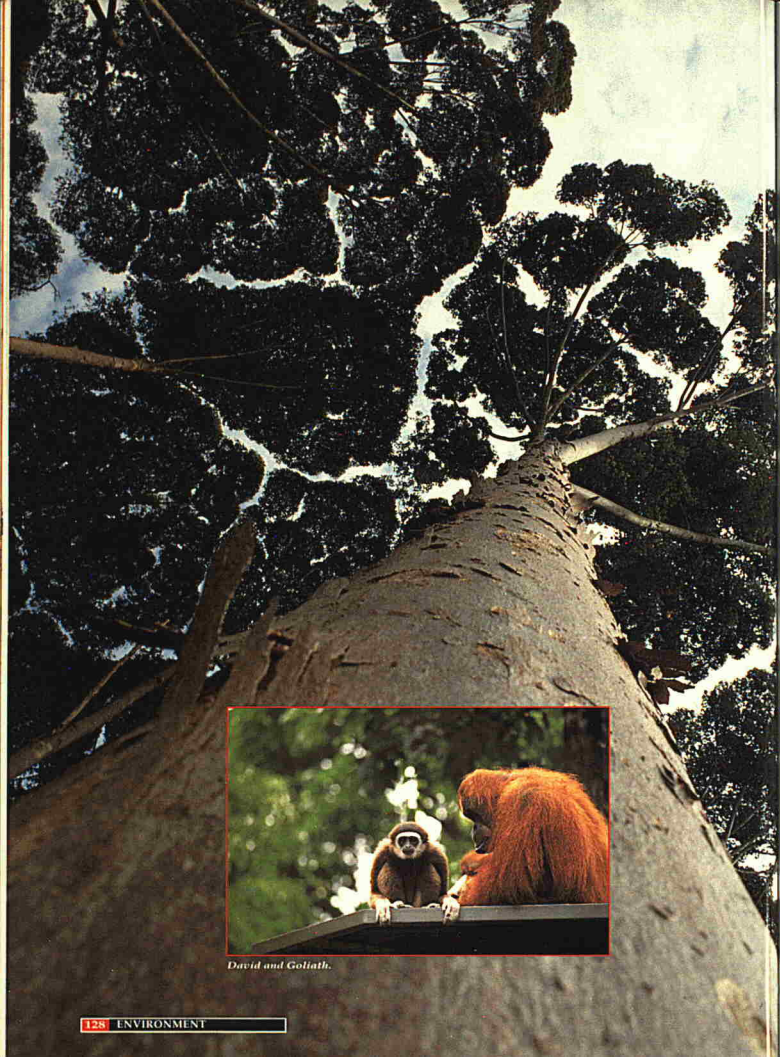
Natural products chemist Prof Dr Nordin Lajis would go so far as to describe the wealth of gene pool in tropical forests as "green gold." International pharmaceutical companies which send research teams to this region to look for new compounds for new drugs seem to agree with him.

Likewise the National Cancer Institute of America. Its 1986-1991 programme for plant collection in South East Asia involved 35 collecting trips and netted more than 2,500 species in 1,000 genera and 214 families.

An example was the NCI's discovery of a plant in Sarawak called *callophyllum lenigerum* (locally called betangor). The plant was found to contain a compound, callonolide A, which has anti-HIV properties. The latest news is that the compound has been successfully synthesised.

"Each of these compounds is worth thousands





David and Goliath.

of ringgit, but no credit is given to the host country, nor does it gain from royalty payments or training, even when facilities in local institutions were used," Nordin said.

The 1994 Melaka Accord seeks to correct this injustice. Drawn up by 233 scientists from 31 countries who attended the Eighth Asian Symposium on Medicinal Plants, Spices and Other Natural Products (ASOMPS VIII), it provides for the research to be jointly conducted with a local institution, with the patent to include the host country so as to enable the country concerned to gain commercial benefits from the efforts.

The rainforest in Malaysia is one of the most complex forest systems in the world on par with the Amazon jungle of South America. The size of its gene pool is mind-boggling.

To give an idea - there are an estimated 15,000 species of flowering plants compared with the 2,940 indigenous species in Britain; as many as 100 species of trees (up to 10cm in girth) can be found per hectare of land, not including the species of ferns, shrubs, climbers and others which are not big trees.

Malaysian forests also have five layers of plants. The first is the herb layer, where such plants like siti fatimah and kencing fatimah plants are found. The second layer consists of shrubs which include the senduduk plant. Then, there are three tree layers, with the total height of the forest being 30 metres. The first layer consists of saplings which include a lot of fruit trees, followed by the timber layer. Finally there is the emergent layer of trees whose crowns are bigger. This group includes the meranti, keruing and tualang trees.

In between are other plants - the climbers, epiphytes (plants which grow on other plants, such as orchids), parasites such as the famous rafflesia plant and finally, the saprophytes (plants which live on dead plants, such as fungi and toadstools).

The forest is also important for the preservation of the gene pool in the animal world, a need which cannot be met by zoos where the pool is small and interbreeding can lead to recessive genes, thus making the animals more vulnerable to diseases.

"You also cannot get much information on the animals, such as how they live and eat, from zoo observations. So the best place for them is their natural habitat,"



NST FILE PHOTO

Cruising down the river on a Sunday afternoon....



NST FILE PHOTO

Dr Nordin Lajis.



Two rhinos getting horny.



Kiew said, adding that most animals live in the lowland forests where they face danger from human activities. Some, like the Javan rhino and the benteng (small cattle), are extinct while the Sumatran rhino is on the verge of extinction.

Kiew also talks of the cultural heritage of the people in relation to the forest.

"A lot of cultural roots go back to the forest, such as the practise of traditional medicine like the tongkat ali. In fact, the major medicines of modern Man, such as quinine (for malaria) and ephedrine (chest infections) were discovered because they were used by the local people. It would be sad if through urbanisation and the destruction of the forests, future generations lose this knowledge."

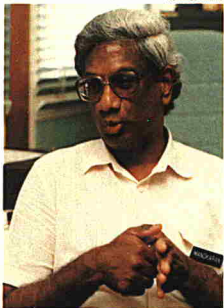
The information locals can provide of the quality, types and values of forest flora is crucial to the discovery of new medicines as without such information, it is the proverbial search for the needle in the haystack.

"With this knowledge, you can narrow down the search. In fact the experience of the New York Botanical Garden has shown that if you utilise local knowledge, the potential for discovery is enhanced from 1:200 samples to 1:12."

Another factor underlining the importance of forest preservation is that the true commercial value of the forest has also not been fully tapped, for example, in ornamental gardens.

"Most of the plants that are commercialised now were introduced from elsewhere but not local species, including shrubs, trees and orchids," Kiew said.

NST FILE PHOTO



Dr N. Manokaran arguing for forest conservation.

Forest ecologist Dr N. Manokaran feels the argument that conservation would stand in the way of development no longer holds water.

"Nobody is saying forests should not be harvested, but they are being threatened by the way they are exploited. We have now reached a state of development where we can and should make sure our forests are not destroyed.

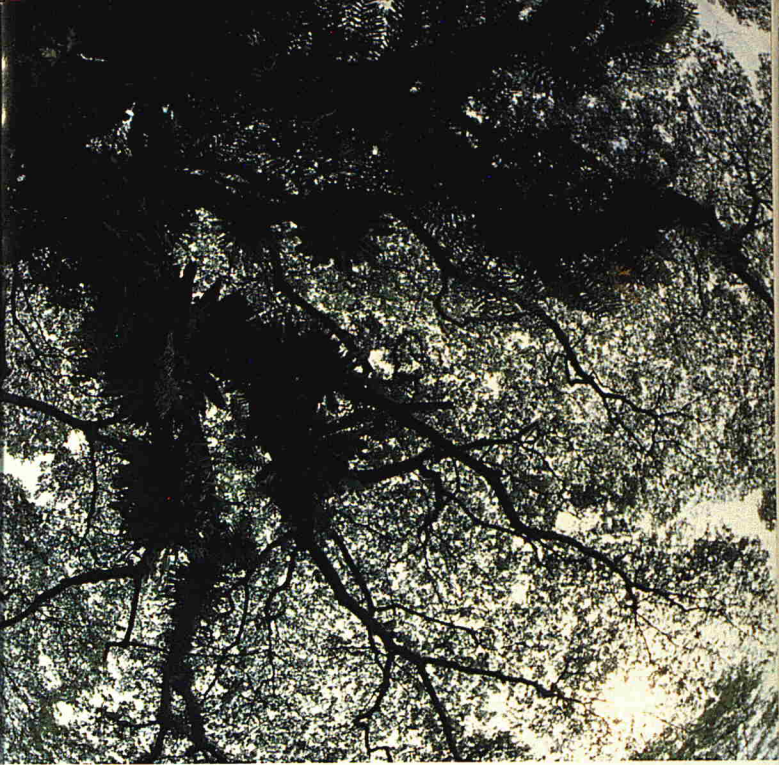
"They have to be preserved for various functions which have long-term implications. The public must be aware of the importance of forest conservation and efforts should be made to ensure the quality and supply of forest resources of the future are not jeopardised by



present-day practices," he said.

Malaysians are still a lucky lot, he said, with 56 percent of the total land area under forest cover. When oil palm and rubber plantation land is included, the coverage comes to about 72 percent.

Forest conservation is given ample protection by the National Forestry Act 1984 which stipulates selective management system of the forest. Under this, only trees of 45 cm diameter can be cut



down, with the logger limited to seven to 12 trees per hectare. Theoretically, this system should ensure enough forest land for future needs. However, other factors may make it difficult to obtain the goal, not least being the pressure constantly placed on land by an increasing population.

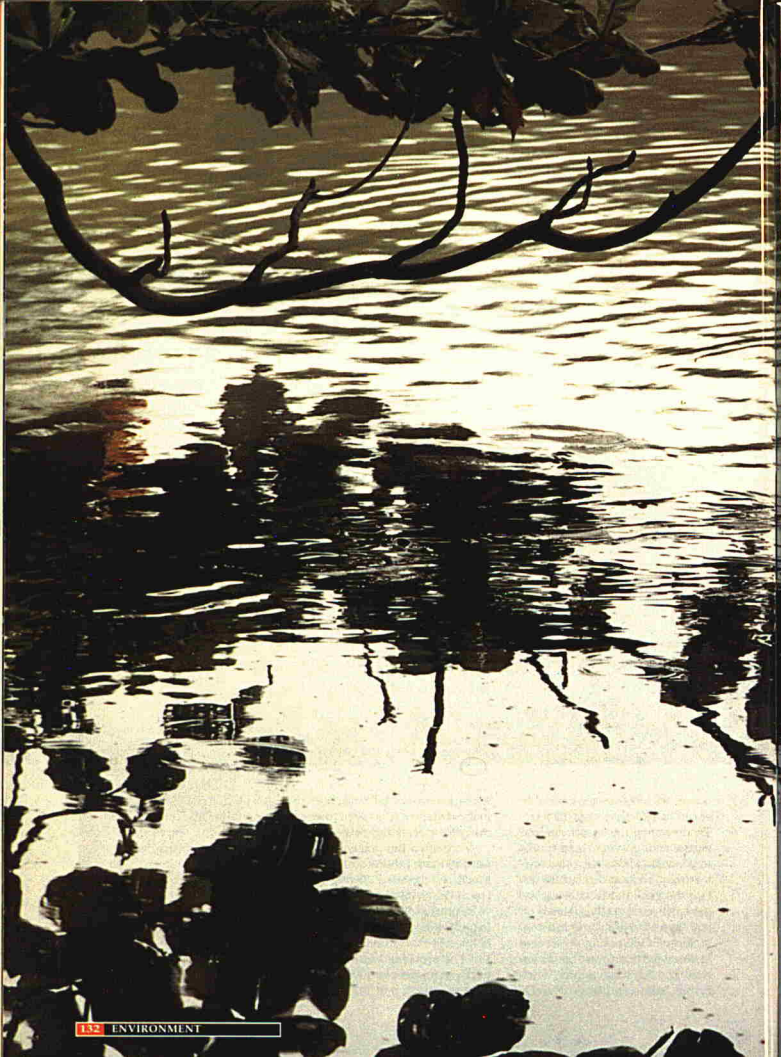
Despite increasing awareness of the need for forest conservation among Malaysians, with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr

Mahathir Mohamad himself giving his word at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro that 50 percent of the country will be covered by forest, many local scientists and environmentalists remain sceptical.

Very often the practice does not conform with theory, an ecologist said, naming Johor and Pahang as states where the forests have been raped and repeated logging is done too soon for the land to recover. On top of this is the damage wrought by illegal logging activities.

"Forestry matters come under the state governments which give out logging licences indiscriminately while the Federal government looks helplessly away," the ecologist said.

"The problem is enforcement, partly because the licences are given to powerful people. At the same time, the forestry sector itself is badly fragmented.



"While the licence to log is given to one company, other aspects of the business, like transporting and sawmilling, are given piecemeal to other companies. In the end, each looks out only for his own immediate interests and is not bothered about future crops."

If, on the other hand, the whole concession, such as the licence to log for 100 years (the time needed for the trees to mature), is given to only one logger, he will log more carefully as he will have to consider his long-term benefits.

The ecologist feels that in the future, Malaysians have to be more conservation-minded to ensure that not all forests are loggable and that such places like wildlife sanctuaries and national parks are protected.

"Whether we like it or not, the opinion of the international community does affect us. For instance, the anti-tropical hardwood timber campaign has resulted in a lot of pressure for industries in many European countries not to accept tropical timber. The world is looking at how we manage our forests, especially since many of the tropical countries have mismanaged theirs," Manokaran said.

For those quick to disregard international opinion, ecologist Dr S. Appanah reminds that Biodiversity is an international issue, and refers to the large amount of life contained in tropical forests. As much as 50 percent of life on earth is contained in tropical forests, and the dipterocarp forests which are found in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines contribute as much as 30 percent of life on earth.

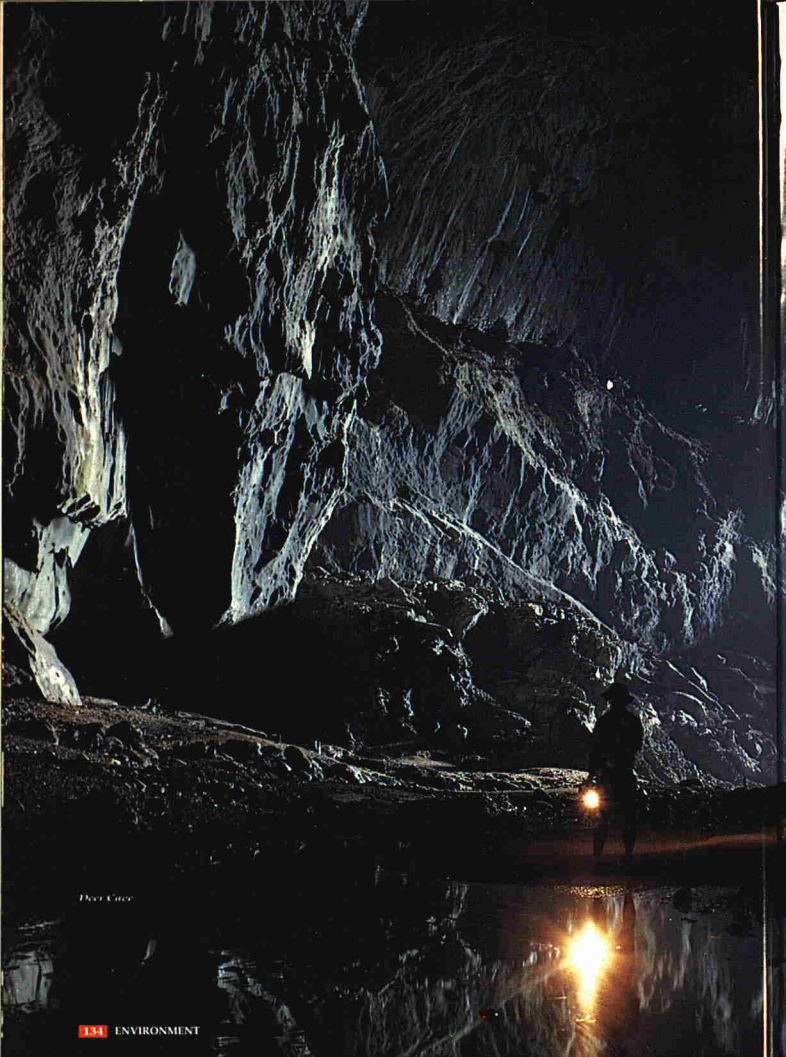
"We want to preserve life and there are ethical and economic reasons for this. In the first place, do we as human beings have the right to eliminate another lifeform from the earth?" Appanah asked.

"Also consider the fact that all life can be potentially useful to Man, in some form or another. If you eliminate them, you will lose a potential solution for Man-based problems, whether economic, medical or food."

Appanah also emphasises the aesthetic value of the forests in the natural beauty of the country and its role in maintaining the ecological balance.

Forests are among Mankind's most valuable heritage and need not be destroyed to make way for progress. Conservation and development can and must work hand in hand.





Deer Cave



THE year was 1920. Armed with his muzzle-loading gun and trusty "parang", Berawan hunter Enggan Ipoi pursued his quarry, a

massive rhinoceros, up the narrow and rocky path to the summit of the 2,376-metre Mulu Mountain.

It was his single-mindedness and determination that drove the loin-clothed Berawan to brave the cold and go where no local had dared venture alone.

Enggan, better known as "Tama Nilong", was confident he would eventually secure his prize, a two-horned Sumatran rhinoceros. But it was not to be. Just 600 metres short of the summit, he lost track of the footprints of the ancient beast - a stocky and hairy relative of a larger ancestor which lived 30,000 years ago and whose bones were found in the

Magnificent Mulu

Mulu was already ancient when Man came into the world and would not yield its secrets so easily. The cave network still remains largely unexplored and the jungles still defy intruders

BY JAMES RITCHIE
Photography by Peter Wee



Tiger Cave

Niah Caves near Miri, and of some primitive lifeforms in Europe 30 million years ago.

Disappointed, Tama Nilong returned to his longhouse not far away. For decades, Tama Nilong and his people had hunted the "sambar" (deer) at Deer's Cave but there was nothing like bagging a rhinoceros to add to one's prestige.

What he failed to realise was that he had found the way to the insurmountable Mulu, then thought to be the highest mountain in Sarawak, which had defeated attempts by explorers like Spencer St John, Hugh Low and Charles Hose to scale it. Even though he did not return with the rhino, Tama Nilong's peers were impressed by his epic climb. Soon, the word spread.

Twelve years later, in November 1932, Tama Nilong was picked to lead an Oxford University expedition headed by Lord Edward Shackleton. After several days of climbing, they reached the summit at 9.40 am on November

19 1932 to become the first people to conquer Mt. Mulu.

In Lord Shackleton's words: "The way had really been found by a rhinoceros hunter called Tama Nilong who had followed a trail which had led him past the cliffs until he reached the main southwest ridge of Mulu. He had a difficult time, for he was without food for 13 days but it was with him as guide, together with a party of 19 other Berawans, that I set out.

"He (Tama Nilong) guided my party through the cliffs and up the same trail so skilfully that we had not one single rock-face to climb," added Shackleton (Scientific Results of the Oxford University Expedition to Sarawak in 1932).

Mulu has come a long way since Tama Nilong's epic climb. After the 52,866-hectare (544 sq km) Gunung Mulu National Park was gazetted, explorers have been making discovery after discovery which had turned the park into a world-famous attraction.

Mulu is reputed to have one of the best cave complexes in the world. It features:

- the world's largest natural chamber called Sarawak Chamber capable of accommodating 40 Boeing 747s or 7,500 buses at any one time
- the world's largest cave passage called Deer Cave which can house five St Paul Cathedrals
- South-East Asia's longest cave called Clearwater Cave measuring 75 km long

Caves that go by the name of Leopard's Cave, Tiger's Cave, Turtle Cave, Snake Cave, Drunken Forests Cave, Cobra Cave, Cobweb Cave, Tiger Back Cave and Cave of the Winds have their own unique character, making Mulu an unforgettable experience. Scores of other spectacular caves are a speleologist's paradise.

There are for example unique rock formations such as that of the profile of Abraham Lincoln, a jungle of slanting tree-trunks, a bull guarding the entrance to Deer

Cave, a King's Chamber, a Royal Lady and human being, sea-shell stalactites, a rat, jellyfish and more.

Since the 1977-1978 Royal Geographic Society's cave exploring expedition, several other major expeditions have resulted in the discovery of nearly 200 km of new caves. So far, only 28 caves have been explored and experts believe this represents only about 30 percent of the caves in Mulu. It will take at least 50 years to uncover the remaining caves.

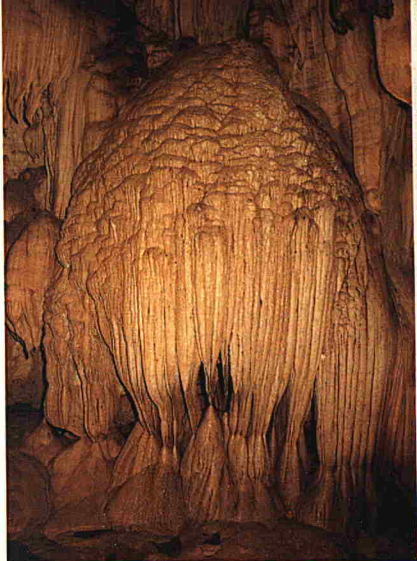
Exploring the caves is quite a task. For example, it can take about a week to walk from the mouth of Clearwater Cave to its source which is a hole in the roof of the limestone massif. A connection was built between Clearwater Cave and Cave of the Winds in November 1988. With the link, the two cave systems have become the longest cave system in South-East Asia.

However, during expeditions, adventurers must be prepared to sleep in crevasses in the cave along the cave tunnel. Travelling is done through a pitchdark cave and the high point is reaching the source of the river that flows through Clearwater Cave.

Those who have done this can testify to it. Nilong Man, who claims to be a descendant of Tama Nilong, once told the NST: "When we climbed out of the roof of the mountain, it was a wonderful experience. It was as if we had emerged from another world."

But such trips can also be dangerous. On one expedition, Nilong and two British explorers were trapped in a small tunnel following a heavy downpour which caused the water to rise to the neck within minutes.

"We had been exploring the caves for a day or two when the water level began rising. We were trapped in a small cavern whose



Bizarre limestone cave formation

roof was as high as my head. We could not go forward or retreat and just prayed for a miracle. By God's grace, the water level only reached up to my neck. Within seconds, the water began to subside to our ankles. We were fortunate it was a short thunderstorm."

Of course, such trips are not recommended for the average tourists who have their own itinerary. For them, just looking at some of Nature's awesome wonders will take up most of their time.

Gunung Mulu National Park which was officially established in 1974 has been described as a "Garden of Eden" (in fact, there is a scenic spot called such). Here can be found many of Sarawak's 20,000 animal, plant and insect species, mountain complex and cave system described as the best

in the world.

The 30-million-year-old area contains 67 types of mammals, birds (262), frogs (74), ants (4,578), butterflies (281) and fish (47). The park has more than 1,500 species of flowering plants including 170 species of orchids, 10 species of pitcher plants and many species of fungi, mosses and ferns.

The park was opened to visitors in 1985 but it was only five years later in 1990 that tourists were able to enjoy the caves when Deer, Clearwater, Winds and Lang's caves were provided with better facilities.

The authorities went on a multimillion ringgit drive to give these caves a facelift, providing cave lighting to focus on the special features of this once dark world, improving footpaths and laying new plankwalks.

More facilities are expected in



A plankwalk snakes through the forest

the future as the Federal government and state authorities intend to explore the possibility of making the Sarawak Chamber accessible to visitors. At present, it takes about three hours of walking through primary swampland and wading through chest-high water at a long and narrow gap to reach the chamber.

If all goes well, the authorities intend to construct a plankwalk

to the entrance of this massive cavern which has been called a "big black hole".

Accommodation for visitors is quite ample. Apart from 100-odd chalets and lodging houses (some with karaoke lounges), there is the 76-room Royal Mulu Resort, an international-level hotel next to Melinau River. A government resthouse complex is located near the RM8.5 million airstrip to car-

ter for the daily trips by Malaysia Airlines' (MAS) Twin-Otter aircraft.

Visitors need only ask and will discover many descendants of Tama Nilong. These Berawan trekkers have been traditionally known as the best explorers and trekkers in the region.

But then, all of Sarawak's rural natives are good trekkers. Some of the best are the Penan



who live not far from Royal Mulu Resort at Batu Bungan, a newly-built longhouse complex due to become a Penan Service Centre by 1995. A short trip away is another Penan longhouse at Long Iman where there are also able-bodied trekkers.

Those not travelling in tour groups can engage the services of park guides at RM20 per day through the National Parks and

Wildlife office in Miri. No visitor is permitted to enter the park without guides.

Like their great rhinoceros hunter ancestor, most Berawan today have explored the jungles surrounding the Mulu massif and climbed Mulu, Benarat and Api mountains which now have proper footpaths. Mountain climbing enthusiasts must realise that not too long ago, scaling the

Api mountain was not that easy, as 19th century explorer St John discovered.

In his two attempts to scale Mulu in 1857 and later the Gunung Api limestone massif's pinnacles in 1858 with Hugh Low, he described the treacherous journey as follows: "We worked our way over the most dangerous places, where a false step would have broken our necks or limbs



Thick green jungle of the Mulu complex

or cut us to pieces on the sharp rocks; the Malay description of it is true - sharp axes below and pointed needles above."

Like Gunung Mulu, the neighbouring 1,750-metre Gunung Api limestone massif was yet another of the many challenges the mountain complex provided adventurers. Indeed, the 50-metre high limestone pinnacles, with their sharp and

pointed tips, are considered among the best wonders of the world. Today, it is not uncommon to find that some local inhabitants have climbed Mulu's peak as many as 50 times. In the old days it would have taken a week to do it. Thanks to Tama Nilong's famous trail, it now takes about two days to get to the top.

Adventurers making their first

trip to Mulu would find the jungle as untouched and pristine as when it was first discovered by Spencer St John, the first person to attempt to scale Gunung Mulu in 1857.

"We found a rocky eminence before us, its sharp angles concealed by ferns and climbing plants falling in festoons around, and luxuriant vegetation trees, whose bark was coated with



mosses, orchids and other epiphytal plants," said St John when he first laid eyes on the natural surroundings.

Mulu has changed little. Despite modern developments to lure more tourists to Sarawak's jungle wonderland, the forests St John saw still remain "luxuriant and wild."


How to get to Mulu

There are daily MAS flights

from Miri to Mulu, which takes about 30 minutes. A longer but equally exciting way to get there is by express boat from Kuala Baram, linked by road to Miri, to the upriver town of Marudi. The journey takes two to three hours.

From Marudi, travellers must charter a longboat and go up the Tutoh River past the famous Berawan longhouse at Long Terawan and along a tributary

named the Melinau River before finally reaching their destination. The whole journey can take a day.

From 1986 to June 1994, more than 50,000 people (about half of them foreigners) have visited Mulu Park. Mulu has also won the Malaysian Tourism Award twice, in 1990 and 1992, in the "Best Tourist Attraction" category. 

An aerial photograph of the Kuala Lumpur skyline, showing numerous high-rise buildings and skyscrapers. The image is taken from a high angle, looking down on the city. The buildings are densely packed in the center, with some taller ones standing out. The lighting is somewhat dim, giving it a moody, urban feel. The title 'Kuala Lumpur Pr' is overlaid on the top half of the image in a large, white, serif font.

Kuala Lumpur Pr

Photography by Azlan Azlan, Shahrul Azhar Shahrudin,
Mukhlis Kamaruddin, Ab Samad

An aerial photograph of a dense urban landscape, likely Singapore, featuring a variety of architectural styles from modern glass skyscrapers to older, more traditional buildings. The text 'eserves its Heritage' is overlaid in a white serif font. The number '9' is visible on the side of a prominent white building in the lower right.

eserves its Heritage



F

OUNDED on the confluence of two rivers, Kuala Lumpur has a history that witnessed a century of colonial rule spanning two World Wars, the movement for Independence of the country culminating in Independence on August 31 1957 and the formative years when a new-born nation struggled to forge a new identity.

From its rough-and-tumble beginnings as a mining town, Kuala Lumpur underwent rapid development marked by a series of historic milestones, beginning with it becoming the capital of Selangor in 1880, the administrative centre of the Federated Malay States in 1896, and the capital of the Federation of Malaya in 1948. Further milestones were reached when the country attained independence in 1957 and the modern nation of Malaysia was created in 1963, which saw Kuala Lumpur made the national capital before its elevation to its present status as a Federal Territory in 1974.

Each phase of its history spurred the city's growth, often bringing about great physical changes that transformed the face of Kuala Lumpur over the years. Where a collection of wooden buildings and attap huts on mosquito-infested

mudflats once stood, an ultra-modern city now sprawls. Spread along the Klang Valley, Kuala Lumpur is today home to over a million people, the heart and soul of the nation, and the seat of national politics, administration, finance and commerce for the country.

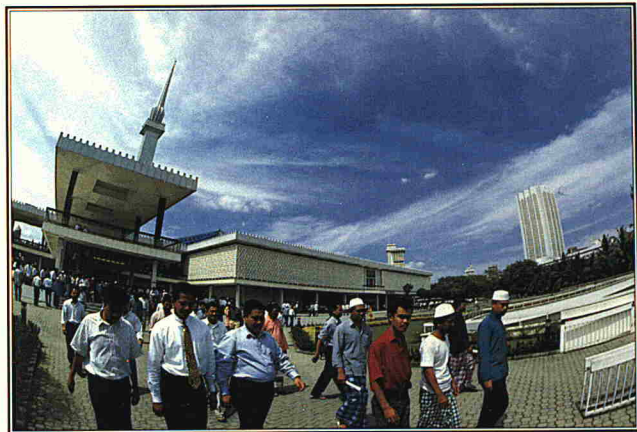
Despite its highly urban image, Kuala Lumpur still preserves the heritage of its past. Its mixed legacy can be seen in minarets of old and Moghul-style arched doorways and windows, Gothic and Tudor buildings, stucco and art deco structures existing together with towering office blocks of steel, glass and concrete. Here is where elements of Islamic architecture, touches of north Indian palaces, facades of Malay istanas and contemporary building designs can be found rubbing shoulders with one another.

The Railway Station with its domes at the corners and Sultan Abdul Samad Building with its copper cupolas and lofty clocktower are grouped in one area together with the English Tudor style Royal Selangor Club and the stunningly modern landmark of Dayabumi building.

Kuala Lumpur is truly a city where the old meets the new, where the skyline is a blend of skyscrapers and traditional exteriors. However, behind this apparent split personality lies a beautiful balance and harmony as Kuala Lumpur acknowledges its roots while building for the present and the future.

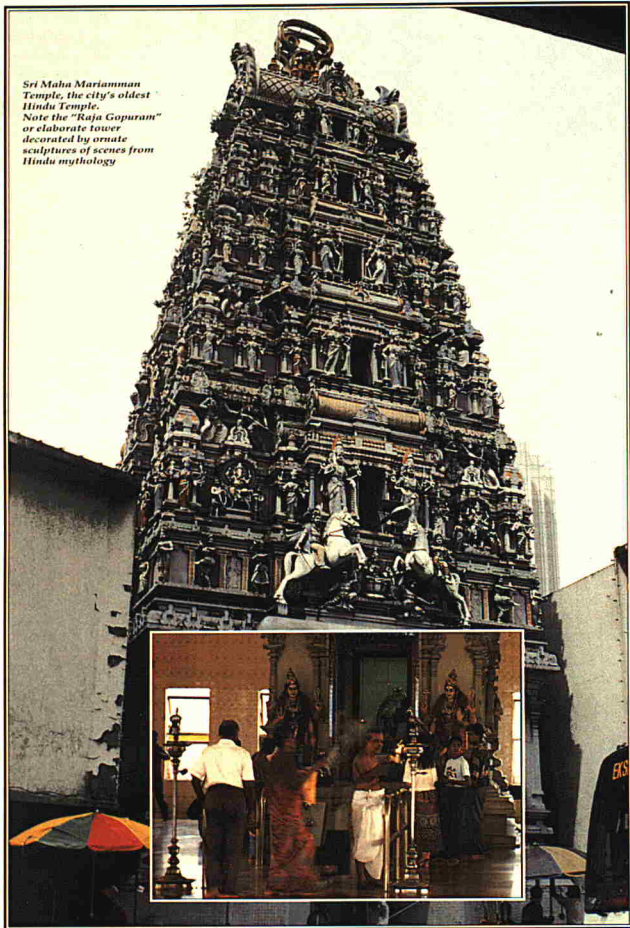


Jamek Mosque, which stands where the Gombak and the Klang rivers meet



Muslims streaming out of the National Mosque after Friday prayers

Sri Maha Mariamman Temple, the city's oldest Hindu Temple. Note the "Raja Gopuram" or elaborate tower decorated by ornate sculptures of scenes from Hindu mythology





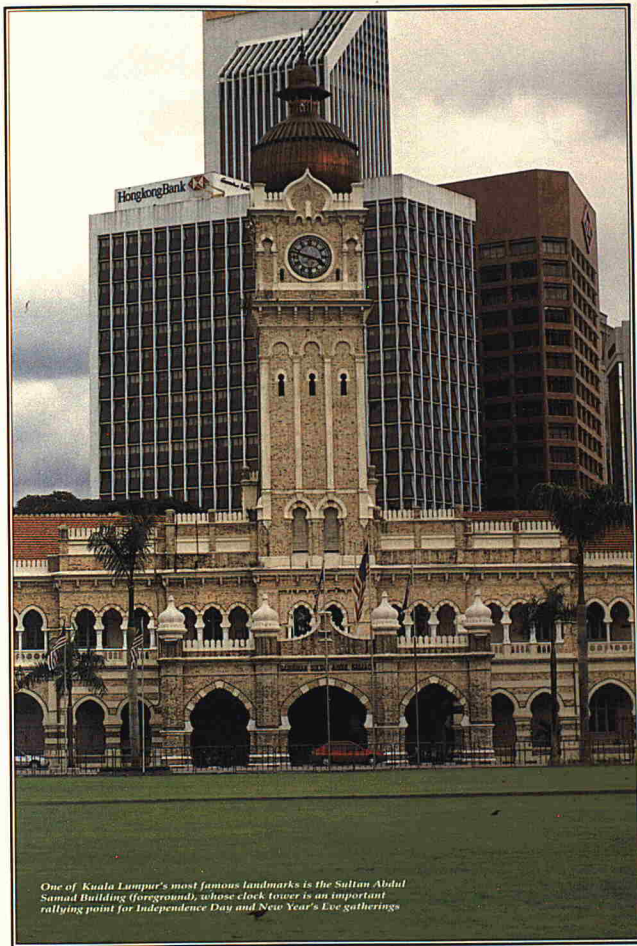
Occupying 73 hectares of land, Tasik Perdana with its large lake and landscaped environs provides a much-needed green lung for the city



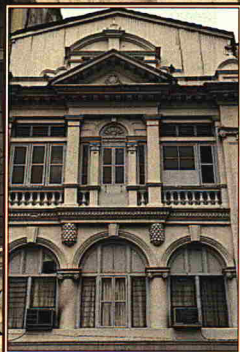
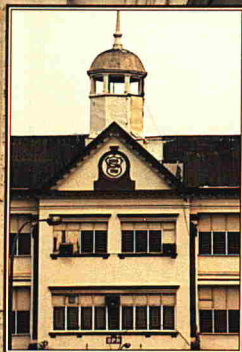
Part of the city's heritage, seen through a fish-eye lens

A Chinese temple. Inset shows the devotees

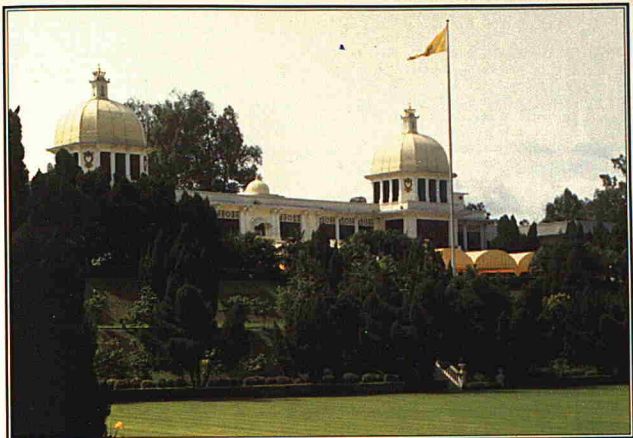




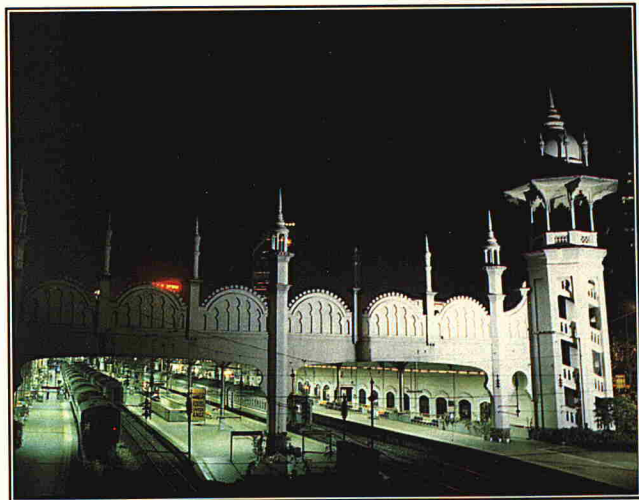
One of Kuala Lumpur's most famous landmarks is the Sultan Abdul Samud Building (foreground), whose clock tower is an important rallying point for Independence Day and New Year's Eve gatherings



*The many faces of
Kuala Lumpur*



Istana Negara, where the Yang di Pertuan Agong is in residence



Kuala Lumpur Railway Station by night

MALAYSIANS have inherited a truly well-endowed land. A fertile land bathed in a myriad of colours. Throw in a fascinating variety of people and it makes for a truly potent brew. Yet, for the most part, we remain blissfully unaware of these wonders. Even if we do notice them, it is the flaws that strike the eye.

But then, a diamond looks just like an ordinary stone. Its brilliance is only revealed when you have chipped away at the rough surface. Likewise, if you look deep into the heart of the country and are willing to disregard the rough edges, you may see the treasure that lies at the core.

However, do not take your time about it. As development exacts its inevitable toll, by the time you want to discover the wonders of the land, there may not be very much of authentic Malaysia left.

So, before you forget what padi fields and rubber trees look like, you should perhaps put a discovery of the country on the top of the agenda for your next holiday. And while you're at it, why not add some extra flavour

A train ride through the heartland of the peninsula that becomes a journey into self-realisation; of seeing with new eyes a shared past, history and heritage

BY NIRMALA MENON
Photography by Saleh Osman

On Board the Eastern and



Dinner is a formal affair.



Watching the world go by from the observation deck.

Oriental Express

and travel by train? That way, you also get to re-live a bygone era when rail was about the only major mode of transportation for the country.

That was what this writer and a photographer decided to do. To make it even more of a memorable experience, we decided to conduct the "experiment" in style, on board the so-called palace-on-wheels – the Eastern & Oriental Express.

This Southeast Asian counterpart of the Orient Express made so famous by authors like Agatha Christie and Graham

Greene is the last word in luxury. It takes you through three different countries in about 42 hours, and in a princely manner too.

But it's a privilege that comes with a hefty price tag, for the average traveller, at least. A one-way trip from Singapore to Bangkok costs a minimum of S\$1,000 (S\$1 = RM1.74). And that's just for the standard compartment.

For a state compartment, you would need to shell out S\$2,520 while a presidential suite can set you back a whopping S\$4,790.



A member of the train crew.



A breath-taking sight.

The two of us chose to board the train at Singapore. It wasn't until we had an encounter with immigration officials that it struck us that as passengers of this luxury train, we were indeed a privileged class. These officials could actually smile. It was a relief to discover that not all of the breed worldwide suffer from severe paralysis of the facial muscles!

The all-too-brief run through Singapore was the trip's "appetiser", a brief display of the island state's well-known orderliness. If cleanliness is indeed next to godliness, we were knocking on heaven's doors here!

Forty-five minutes later, we were well on our way to savouring the "main course" - Peninsular Malaysia. Despite the proximity of the two countries, there is a startling contrast between the cheerful mixture of the order and chaos of Malaysia and the well-regulated existence of Singapore.

The journey across Peninsular Malaysia begins in the state of Johor. After the concrete jungles of Singapore, the greenery in this southernmost state comes as a welcome relief. It represents an enchanting prelude to what awaits the visitor in the rest of the country.

The countryside is dotted with rubber and oil palm plantations; these crops reign supreme in the country's important agricultural activities. For the first-time visitor, the sight of a rubber tree being tapped is a memorable one. This is an activity which has not been taken over by machines and is still being carried out in the traditional, almost archaic manner of the past.

Interestingly enough, rubber trees are not native to the country, the very first plants having been brought into the country from Kew Gardens in England.

It is evening tea time on the E & O. Kai, our gentle steward with the sweet smile, serves it to us in style. Silver and porcelain are the order of the day. It is nice to be pampered so. One could get used to it!

The E & O's observation deck at the end of the train is a strategic vantage point from which to watch the world go by. It abuts the smaller of two bar cars where you can slake your thirst and nibble on pistachios, waited upon by attentive hostesses who obligingly refill the tidbit dishes as fast as they are emptied.

As the train travels along at a leisurely 60kph, it's easy to while away the hours on



the deck. And it can be a very rewarding experience too. Watch that child wave at you with a big smile on its face. That wizened old lady with a toothless smile sitting at the entrance to the hut is perhaps the child's grandmother. She has the wisdom of age written on her lined face.

Gaze upon rubber tappers busy at their daily tasks. See the people in kampungs which look like they have not felt the winds of change for generations, so old-worldly do they seem. That is of course until you spy the brand new cars parked outside the quaint wooden houses!

But the smiles are rated as the best draw in this part of the world. It's a sign of natural friendliness, a characteristic that has almost died a natural death in the West. "People here are always smiling," exclaims John Coe, the train manager. It's infectious actually. Even the more reserved amongst us feel compelled to reciprocate, and everyone waves madly until those figures are just little toys in the distance. In the face of such warmth, one almost forgets that the radiant smiles seem incongruous when set against the occasionally grim backdrop of poverty.

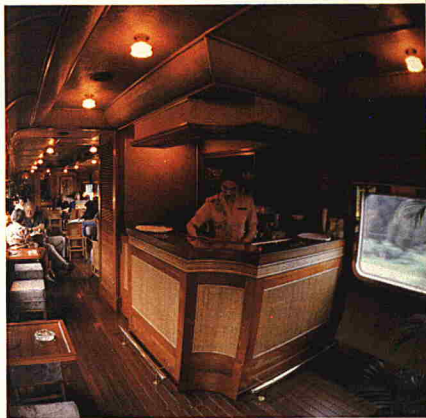
We travel through the town of Kulai. Old style shophouses line the roads. It is late evening, and people are unwinding from a hard day's work in some of the coffee shops. These ubiquitous little shops are a common sight throughout the country, stubbornly surviving relics of bygone days. Their dark interiors are home to strictly utilitarian tables and chairs. Comfort may not be a byword, but for many, they remain a tangible reminder of a time when life was much simpler.

A while later, we pass tantalisingly near the state of Malacca. It is a historical place, dominated by the Portuguese, the Dutch and then the British at various different times in the country's history. Each had left indelible impressions, but the Portuguese made the strongest mark. Which child has not been taught that Portugal's Alphonso D'Albuquerque landed there in 1511? Thus began an association which was to last a long, long time. Inter-marriage was inevitable. Today, their descendants, the Eurasians, add character to the already colourful melting pot of the nation which is made up of three major races - Malay, Chinese and Indian.

It is late evening and the shadows are beginning to descend; there is more greenery as we pass yet more estates. On board, there is a fortune teller who reads palms, revealing what the future holds. There are also a couple of Chinese opera performers with their fantastically made-up faces and colourful costumes. No loud rock and roll music or discos here!

Outside, there is a show of a different sort going on. It is a celestial performance - the heavens have decided to put on a spectacular display to bid the sun goodbye. The sky blushes becomingly, tinges of pink and peach slowly deepening into crimson patches. An unseen hand puts in shades of violet and sapphire and soon, the sky is afire in a myriad of colours which no mortal could possibly reproduce. Closer to earth, the dying golden rays of the sun play tantalisingly among the trees, darting sprite-like amongst the leaves which sway gently in the evening breeze. And thus the sun bids adieu...

The setting sun also heralds that most mysterious time of day - twilight. With it comes the sound of crickets, the occasional



Small bar adjoining observation deck.

call of some night animal. It is difficult to pick up these sounds, but if you listen carefully, you may be able to hear them above the monotonous sound of the train rushing along on its tracks.

Being witness to such a performance each day, one may well become blasé. That is when it's time for a different perspective. "It's different," says the handsome Brazilian travelling with his striking-looking wife. An understatement, certainly. But enough to jolt you into an acute sense of awareness of the country, of how it appears to the foreigner.

Dinner time on the train is formal in the extreme. Passengers dressed in all their finery begin trickling into the cosy bar for cocktails. At the main bar, a pianist strokes the keys gently, setting the mood for an unforgettable evening. As the bar fills up, the clink of glasses and muted conversations interspersed with the occasional voice lifted in laughter become the order of the day.

These are not the average train passengers. On the E & O, you rub shoulders with the rich and the famous and their ilk. That distinguished gentleman in the corner could well be Lord Whatever of Wherever. And that stately looking lady with diamonds glittering in her ears and around her neck may just turn out to be a Contessa with an unpronounceable name. Our sojourn on board this time was enlivened by the presence of a well-known movie star – Sam Neill, of Kane & Abel, Jurassic Park and The Piano fame.

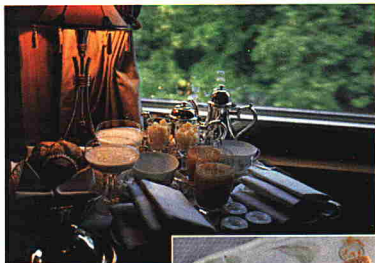
Out on the observation deck, it is quite cold. The wind plays havoc with well-coiffured hair and one by one, the passengers beat a hasty retreat into the warm confines of the bar. Soon, there is just one brave soul left. It's a beautiful night, and there is a lone star shining brightly in the sky. Occasionally, a distant light from some unknown place shines through the inky darkness. Jungle smells waft through the still night. Peace reigns...

It is time to go in to dinner. And what a treat for jaded palates as sumptuous course after course is set before you. The chef himself makes his rounds at the end of the meal: like a king, he graciously receives congratulations for the wonderful repast he has served up.

Late at night, the train arrives at the nerve centre of the country. Kuala Lumpur, the capi-



Lunch on board.



Breakfast served in compartment.



A sumptuous dessert



tal of Malaysia, is just a short 45-minute stop on the E & O's schedule. Its residents have a love-hate relationship with this colourful city. They may complain about the pollution and the traffic jams, yet feel very proud of the city.

Those who do not break their journey at KL take with them memories of the Islamic style architecture of the railway station, curtained by a delicate veil of moonlight. The arches and domes loom gracefully against the night sky, acquiring a sheen not unlike a pearl. It is tantalising, dream-like. But all too soon, the train begins to pull away, breaking the spell.

By this time, the gently rocking motion of the train has had a soporific effect and you drift off to sleep. Your dreams are calm and gentle: images of a peaceful, beautifully blessed country are uppermost. And while the Sandman has you in his grip, the train continues to move steadily into the state of Perak.

You have had a refreshing night's sleep, thanks to the smooth almost sensuous motion of the train. We are still travelling through Perak; the train is now passing Tasik Bukit Merah. It is a magnificent sight; the lake is quite calm.

Apart from the train which streaks through the countryside like some giant insect and a lone boatman rowing in the distance, there is scarcely any sign of a living being in the area. It is magnificent in its near-desolation.

The train has reached Butterworth. Pulau Pinang, the Pearl of the Orient, is just a ferry ride across. We have three hours to spend on the island before the train resumes its journey.

There is a deafening sound on the platform. It is a Chinese lion dance troupe with its own unique



The future, as revealed by a fortune teller.



Traditional Chinese welcome in Butterworth.

brand of greeting. Masked figures in Chinese outfits welcome us as we move towards the comfortable coaches waiting to take us on a short tour of Penang island. The Chinese welcome is indicative of the ethnic structure on the island.

One may be a regular visitor to the state. Yet, in the company of visitors, it acquires a special charm. Even more so if the visitors are total strangers to the land. We ride through Chinatown, with its houses on stilts. Hugging both sides of the road are the ubiquitous pre-war wooden shophouses. A wave of nostalgia sweeps through; it is probably just a matter of time before these pieces of history have to give way to condominiums. The price of development.



"Goodbye...." (left to right: Tom Evers-Swindell, John Coe, Chris Bryant).



Not the fastest way of getting around.

The scenery changes as we pass through the hub of the island's capital, Georgetown, with its modern buildings. We draw up at the entrance of the E & O Hotel, the oldest on the island. There, we take a trishaw ride back to the ferry terminal. The trishawmen are elderly, and you feel guilty at allowing them to drag your well-fed self around. The guilt adds a few more ringgit to the tip.

It's back to the train after another traditional Chinese send-off. It is misleading actually. After all, Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-cultural country. It would be better to have representatives of all the races. The logistics involved in getting together such a troupe may be a restrictive factor, but surely

it would be worth the extra effort.

Apart from this, it has been a wonderful trip thus far. Even the weather has been on its best behaviour. It is an appropriate setting to celebrate the first anniversary of the train's launch by Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed.

"I never get tired of these scenes; there's always something new," says Coe. Originally from England, he used to work on the Orient Express before he was lured to its less famous Eastern sister. For a person who has travelled on the Orient Express through the Alps umpteen times, he is appreciative of the totally different landscape which unfolds before him now.

Christopher Byatt, the other train manager on board, is even more enamoured. His conversation reveals an ongoing love affair with Thailand. Indeed, he confesses to having, for the first time, put down his roots in a place; he had bought a property in that country.

The train now runs through the state of Kedah and will soon move into Perlis. The scenery here is largely rural. Padi fields predominate. Indeed, this region is known as the rice bowl of the country. Farmers are busy in some of the fields, bent double over those precious, life-giving plants. These people who till the land – they are indeed the salt of the earth.

In the distance, limestone rock formations in the most fantastic shapes break the mo-

there are army barracks just across. Both Thai and Malaysian police are very much in evidence. Yet, the chance to make a few extra bucks is not to be resisted.

For the uninitiated, the journey into Thailand may not be visually different from Peninsular Malaysia. After all, there are the same padi fields and rubber trees. But there are subtle differences. Look out for the graceful *wat*, or the Thai Buddhist temples. You can even spot them in miniature at roadsides. Very distinctive.

And then there are the lotus ponds. Those graceful blooms which become imbued with a golden aura when touched by the morning sunlight.

Today, there is also a touch of drama. The



A rural scene.

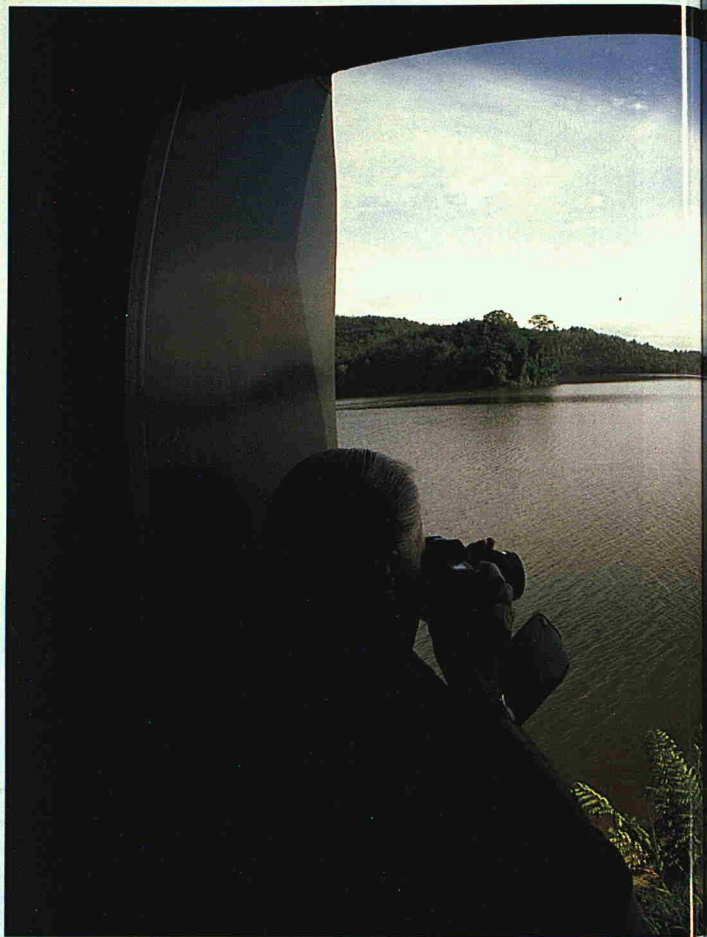
notony of the scene. Each of these probably has some legend attached; Malaysia is rich in such colourful legends. And the thought passes through your mind: where else do you get this quaint mixture of past and present, with a very firm footing in the future as well?

All too soon, the train has arrived at Padang Besar, the last stop in Malaysia before it proceeds into Thailand. This is the "dessert" part of the trip. The train comes to a standstill; immigration procedures will be carried out.

A young man moves furtively across the tracks with a sack across his shoulder. A smuggler. They are a daring breed – after all,



Smiling faces of I & O staff at the journey's end.





train has had a bout with a water buffalo, the animal coming off much the worse from the encounter.

That's Thailand. But then, that's another story altogether.

A journey on the E & O Express is a study in contrasts. It is quite startling and not a little disconcerting to dine on five star meals when the train is passing through squatter areas. And while everyone is dressed to kill at dinner, the train runs through areas where inhabitants are clad in rags.

It is rare to find on board residents of the three countries through which the E & O passes. It is the old tale of familiarity breeding contempt. Tom Evers-Swindell, General Manager of Eastern & Oriental Express Ltd, the four-way joint venture which owns the service, admits as much. "Very few Asians would choose to travel in such style through what is literally their own backyard," he says.

Considering the E & O's rates, it is also not surprising. "We're selling a dream here. And it's a dream for people who have attained a certain standard in life," says Evers-Swindell.


Despite the air of hauteur which surrounds the E & O, it may well turn out to be more than a dream machine. It may be just the vehicle to rediscover the land. This fact was brought home sharply a few days after we had disembarked at Bangkok's busy Hualamphong Station - and were rudely jolted back to reality after two days of being pampered.

The photographer who accompanied this writer actually retraced part of the E & O's northern route just to recapture the scenery the following weekend. He is a very well-travelled gentleman; one would have thought he had seen it all. Yet, here he was, unashamedly entranced by his own "backyard."

If we needed proof of the success of our discovery "experiment", this was certainly it. ■

NST FILE PHOTOS





VIEWED from the air, Pulau Layang-Layang is just a tiny dot in the South China Sea. But the tiny dot is making big waves in the tourism sector and fast earning a reputation as a haven for scuba divers.

Located 300 km off the coast of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, this tropical island with its rich marine ecosystem and tranquil beauty has the potential to become a major tourism destination in the region. Diving is the main attraction, with snorkelling, bird-watching and fishing making up the other activities. More are in the pipeline, including wind-surfing and other non-motorised sports. Whatever they are, the activities share a common characteristic: they are environment-friendly.

Pulau Layang-Layang means Swallow Island and is part of the Spratley group of islands. Once an atoll jutting 2,000 metres from the ocean depths, it has been transformed into a small island six hectares in size. The island took shape in 1985 when the Federal government started reclamation works at the atoll.

There is now a T-shaped resort on the island situated among palm trees planted about two years ago. This is a far cry from the early days when the Malaysian navy had to make do with tents on the coral

outcrops. Today, the din of construction and more reclamation works compete with the call of birds and sound of waves washing up against the shore. Under construction is another building to make available 48 more rooms and a swimming pool. The present building at the resort has 15 rooms, two suites, a dining and a sitting room.

It is easy to see why the island is named after the swallow. On one end is a bird sanctuary, which at any one time is home for about eight species of birds. Signboards warning against egg collect-

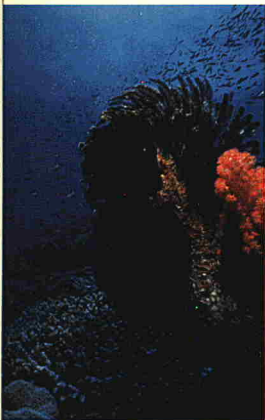


Island of the Swallows

Now not an atoll at all, the island has great potential for ecotourism

BY ANNA TAING

Photographs Courtesy of Layang-Layang Resort

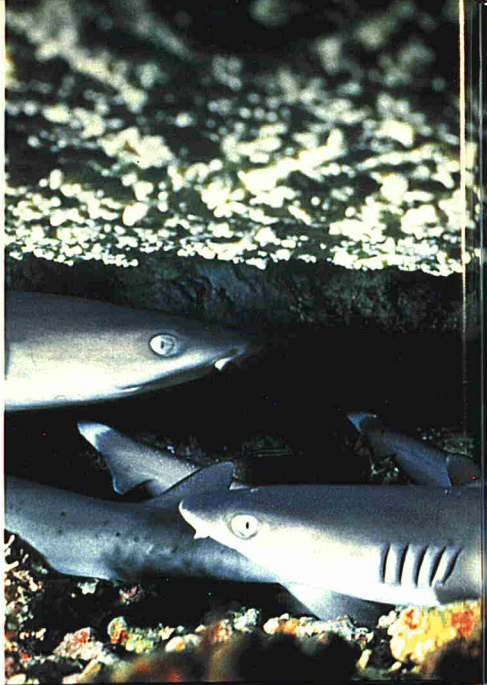


ing and disturbing the birds are strategically placed in the area. The sanctuary, the size of a football field, contains thousands of birds such as terns and gulls. One has to be careful when walking around the place so as not to tread on eggs found in nests on the ground.

The Layang-Layang Resort is jointly owned by M-Ocean Diving Sdn Bhd and Reliance Pacific Bhd. According to Encik Wong Ka Seng, the resort's marketing manager, the top priority is to promote the island as an outstanding diving attraction.

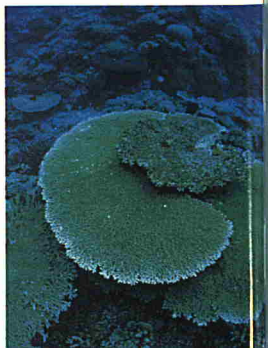
With the major part of the surrounding coral reefs still unexplored, the potential for discovering more beautiful diving sites is great. Divers who have been to Pulau Layang-Layang swear there is none like it anywhere else. Due to its location far from the rest of the world, the island is still unpolluted and hence rich in marine life.

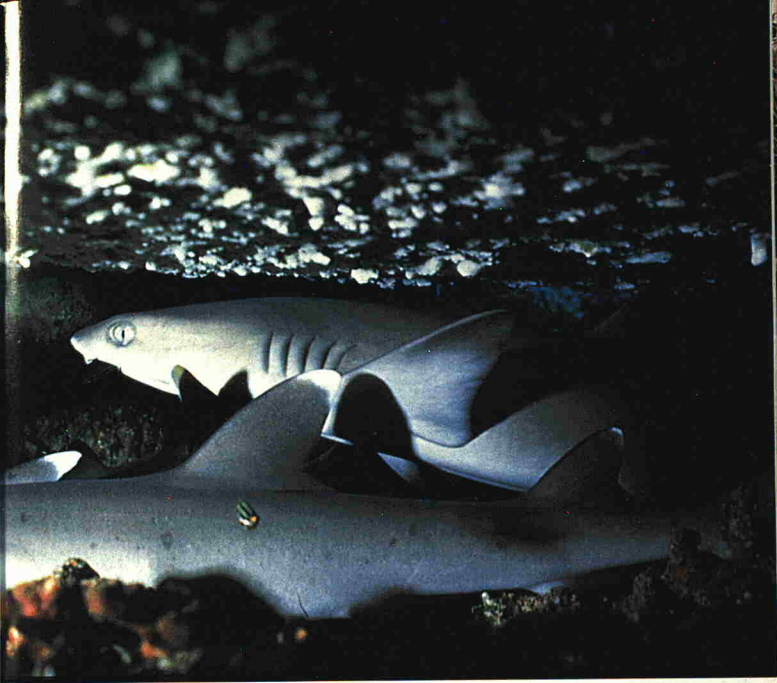
A master diver at the resort, Dominic Monteroso, said that easily sighted at any one of the 10



diving sites are rare creatures of the deep such as the hammerhead shark. Other forms of marine life that can be seen are giant clams, turtles, manta rays and barracudas. Monteroso has also once spotted a baby whale the size of a boat, which he described as the highlight of his diving career.

Divers at Layang-Layang are normally taken on three dives a day unless the weather is bad. Each time they complete their dive, they are treated to a good spread of wholesome food to replenish their energy. Because the resort is quite small, divers soon






get to know one another well, as they are always bumping into each other during dives and at mealtimes.

The island is open for diving from March to September every year. There are plans to extend the season to October. Outside of these months, severe weather conditions make diving and air flights unsafe.

So far this year, more than 500 divers have come to the island, a big increase from the 100 during 1992-1993. Most are foreigners, mainly from Japan, Europe and the US.

Occupancy rate for the resort is about 50 percent but this is set to change following a campaign by the owners to promote the island as a diver's paradise.

Getting to the island has been made much easier with the construction of an airstrip to cater for the 19-seater Twin Otter aircraft. Malaysia Airlines flies four times a week to the island - on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. 



Entrance of the complex from Perak River.



BUILT along the Perak River, Kampung Pasir Salak looks just like any other small village. Houses, a mix of traditional and contemporary structures, line both sides of the road. There is clean water and electricity and the air is fresh and wholesome. Some 400 people, mainly of Acehnese descent, live here, earning a living through farming. They help each other out through gotong royong, the spirit of community self-help that characterises Malay villages.

Behind this peaceful picture of rustic life, however, lies a bloody past. For Pasir Salak is the scene of early Malay rebellion against the British colonial powers some 120 years ago, which culminated in the killing of Perak's first British Resident, James W.W. Birch, and invited a violent reprisal from the British.

There are two ways of getting to Kampung Pasir Salak, located about 70 km from Ipoh and placed under the jurisdiction of the Kampung Gajah District and Land Office. One is via Ipoh/Tanjung Tuallang/Kampung Gajah and the other from the highway at 5th mile Lumut. To enter the village, one has to take a road which, though narrow, is in good condition, just after crossing the bridge linking Pasir Salak with Kampung Gajah.

Apart from the 73 households in the village, there are 11 other houses whose owners live and work elsewhere and return for the Hari Raya.

"The population has stayed more or less the same over the years,"

says Muhammad bin Md Noh, 60, who has been the Tok Sidang of Pasir Salak for eight years. Tok Sidang is the title Perak Malays give village headmen.

The villagers plant padi and grow fruits. Pasir Salak and nearby villages are famous for their durians and pisang emas. Remittances from their children who have jobs in other places supplement their income.

Three provision shops supply the villagers with groceries. There are no medical facilities. When they fall ill, the villagers have to travel four kilometres to Kampung Gajah where there is a small health cen-



The Tok Sidang or village headman.



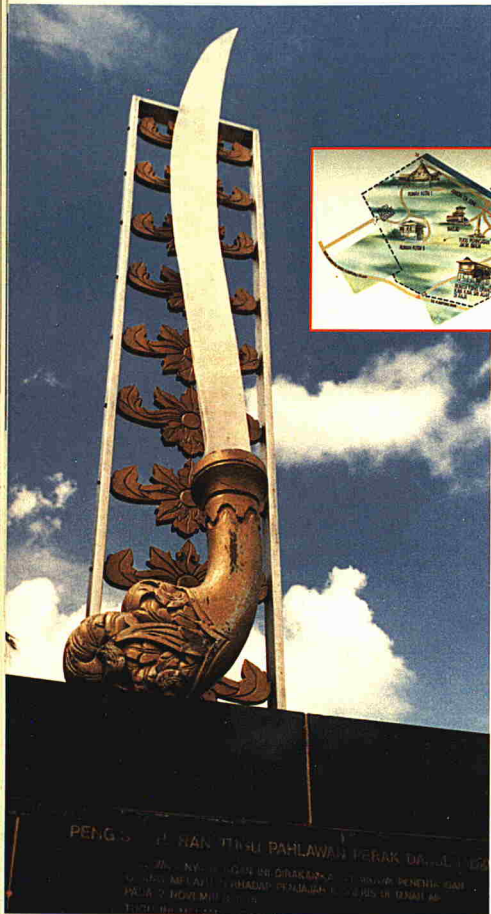
PASIR SALAK — Part of the Nation's History

*One moment in time made Pasir Salak famous forever and cemented
it in place in the nation's history*

BY FAEZAH ISMAIL
Photography by Wong Tuck Keong



A view of the Pasir Salak Historical Complex.



A giant sword, one of the memorials at the historical complex.

tre. The nearest hospital is 14 miles away.

The children go to school at Sekolah Kebangsaan Tok Pelita. Quite close to the Penghulu's office is the postal representative's station which handles the village's mailing needs.



The current interest in Pasir Salak has a lot to do with the village's main claim to fame - the slaying of Birch. On November 2 1875, a group of Malay warriors led by Datuk Maharaja Lela, the chieftain of Pasir Salak, attacked Birch and speared and hacked him to

death. Fierce fighting then ensued between the British and the Malays, ending with the arrest of those involved in Birch's killing. Datuk Maharaja Lela and three of the warriors, Datuk Sagor, Pandak Endut and Siputum, were sentenced to death by hanging. The rest, Kulup Ali, Ngah Jabor, Panjang Bur and Situah, were sent to prison.

Others involved in the conspiracy were also punished. Sultan Ismail was exiled to Johor. Sultan Abdullah, Menteri Ngah Ibrahim, Laksamana Mohamad Amin and Shahbandar Uda Mahamor were shipped to the Seychelles.

Capitalising on the Pasir Salak saga, the Perak state government has been working for some time now to put the village on the tourist map.

The assembling of the Pasir Salak Historical Complex five years ago is the first of the initiatives taken. The complex is sited on an 8.7 acre piece of land encompassing the spot where Birch was killed on the bank of the Perak River. It defies easy description, looking as though the components have been put together in a hurry.

Perhaps the most striking displays are the two Kutai Houses.



One of the Rumah Kutai, built entirely of wood.

"Kutai" is a local title meaning old or ancient. The structure and construction of these houses are said to be unique as they were built entirely of wood, using special joints and grooves and totally lacking any metal and nails. The roofs are ridge-like. In ancient times, the space between the roof and ceiling was used to store rice. It also offered a refuge for beautiful maidens trying to escape from lecherous men.

The first Kutai House contains a display of old weapons used in the war between the Malays and British following the killing of Birch. Pictures of the earlier history of Pasir Salak are also exhibited. The second Kutai House contains an exhibition of objects and artefacts used by Perak Malays in the olden days.

Then there is the Pasir Salak Mosque. The original building was constructed in 1929. In May 1964, a section of the prayer house for Muslims was renovated, with many of its original features preserved.

However, looking somewhat out of place are the Lela Rentaka Monument and the Perak Darul Ridzuan Warriors' Memorial whose contemporary designs are not in harmony with the historical ambience of the complex. The "Lela Rentaka" is a kind of can-



non used by the early Malays during the war with the British while the memorial, dedicated to Datuk Maharaja Lela and his supporters, is designed in the form of a giant sundang, a type of sword.

About 30 metres from the complex is the grave of Siputum – the

last to slash Birch. It was a fatal blow.

As for Birch, his body was recovered by the British and buried at what is now Bandar Baru, five kilometres from Kampung Pasir Salak. According to villagers, the remains had been taken to London and what is left is only his resting place.

The National Museum and Perak state government plan to re-build the house of Datuk Maharaja Lela and the fortress he erected. Both structures had been razed to the ground by British forces.

There are other plans to expand the complex. The state government has already acquired nine more acres of land nearby for building a parking lot and chalets (there are now five) for visitors who want to spend a few days in Pasir Salak.

A rather ambitious project in the pipeline is the "time tunnel" to chronicle historical events of the country up to the present time, with the emphasis on Kampung Pasir Salak and the role it played in the country's past.



The old gallery building in Jalan Ampang.



Converted from a hotel – the present gallery building.



Artist's impression of the new premises to be located in Jalan Tun Razak.

WHEN the National Art Gallery was set up in 1958, hopes were high for the role it would play as the matrix from which would emerge a "national identity" and a "common avenue" for the people to "give shape to their feelings and visions." What has happened since then?

The incident of September 1994 when Gadis Melayu (55.5cm x 45.3cm), a 1959 oil on canvas by pioneer artist Datuk Hoessein Enas, was ripped off its frame hanging in the National Art Gallery (NAG) and spirited out could be taken as an indication of how the original vision has fared.

The painting was one of Hoessein's few impastoos; and the theft was the first since the gallery shifted in May 1984 into the "wedding cake" landmark that was formerly Hotel Majestic.

The wanton, impudent act exposed not just the sloppy security but the state of the gallery and renewed the importance of having a proper art gallery.

Indeed, a new gallery was already in the final stages of negotiations between the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department and Yeoh Tiong Lay (YTL) Corporation.

Said Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Dato Sabbaruddin Chik: "The new gallery should be



ready by end 1996 or early 1997. The principles and design of the new gallery have been accepted."

To be built on 5.5 acres of government land in Titiwangsa, it will be located in a cultural precinct next to the Pangung Negara.

This means the NAG would have to give up its 2.6 hectares of land in Taman Perdana acquired in 1963. Originally, the size was 4ha but part of it had to give way to a road project in 1977 for which the gallery was compensated RM1.1 million.

In the "barter" trade for building the new gallery estimated to cost RM30 million, YTL is to get in exchange, the lease of the present gallery. YTL proposes to re-convert it to a hotel to form an Orient Express rail link with the E&O in Penang and the Oriental in Bangkok.

Such a trade-off is not unusual. The Museum of Modern Art in New York financed itself through the building of a 52-storey luxury apartment block on an adjacent piece of land.

The present NAG edifice, an awkward slapdash of neo-classical building grafted with art deco entrance hall and covered walkway, is a metaphor of its ambivalence as an "adaptive re-use" from a hotel.

Titus Chan called the building conversion a "sex change." The Malaysian-born conservator from New Zealand was hired by the gallery

for two months each in 1988 and 1990 to restore some paintings, but his work was only stop-gap.

The gallery's structure is highly problematic with labyrinthine cubicles, and humidity and dust traps (despite the louvred windows fronting the busy Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin being sealed off).

The structure and the lack of security make it a "sitting duck" for vandals and thieves.

On top of this, the gallery lacks competent staff, especially those trained in museum studies and curatorship and has to rely on "guest" curators (the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art by contrast has more than 100 curators!)

Its collection of 2,500 works in

What Price Art In Malaysia?

BY OOI KOK CHUEN
Photographs Courtesy of
National Art Gallery

New premises is in the offing but old problems remain

various media is in a state of neglect as there is no qualified conservator. One temporary worker, sent for a six-month course in Washington, left after returning as he could not be confirmed in his job.

For the last three years, the gallery has subsisted on an annual grant of RM800,000 from the government, which even Sabbaruddin conceded is hardly sufficient.

It is a "starvation budget", covering staff's salaries, administration and maintenance expenses, cost of exhibitions and publications, promotions, and acquisition of works.

The gallery is now placing its hopes on the Endowment Fund launched by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in October 1993 in conjunction with the "Vision and Ideas: ReLooking Modern Malaysian Art" exhibition and book.

It got a starting pledge of RM4 million - still a long way off from its target of between RM40 million and RM50 million. The government pledged RM2 million





and Petronas made up the other RM2 million. Those who donate RM2 million will have a wing in the new gallery named after them.

However, whatever its defects, the present building has 10 times more space than the two backrooms the gallery had occupied for 25 years in the Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman in Jalan Ampang (now Matic).

It is ensconced on prime land amidst architectural classics like the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station, Masjid Negara, and Dayabumi.

As the Majestic Hotel, built at a cost of RM500,000 in 1937, it was the fount of colonial chic, with its own charm and history.

It was within its musty halls that the preliminary formative meetings of Umno, the backbone of the ruling coalition, were held. The Japanese Imperial Army used it as a transit camp during the war. Coin auctions were also held there for 15 years. On the site once stood the bungalow of the German consul during World War I.

The local elite as well as the British "tuans" (planters and civil servants) were drawn to it not just by the aroma of black-pepper lamb-chops and steaks, but also the ambience.

Among its guests was the country's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, who stayed there for a year!

In a policy paper for the gallery, Ismail Zain, then its first director and secretary, envisioned "a more exhaustive, multi-faceted, democratic institution that places importance on cultural practices generated by a genuine contemporary sensibility which forms the basis of our search for national identity."

Architect Hijias Kasturi, a multiple member of the gallery's Board of Trustees, observed in an interview in 1982: "Culture has to make way for tangible development. But independence is meaningless without national identity."

What constitutes national identity is not so easily defined.

In the same policy paper, Ismail Zain cautioned of the danger of "self-conscious artificiality." "Hackneyed cliché should not therefore be mistaken for the incipient characteristics of contemporary culture."

"Art expresses and reflects the spirit and personality of the people who make up the nation." The gallery is a place "to show Man at his noblest" and for multi-ethnic and multi-cultural engagements, what is probably referred to as "a confrontation of metamorphoses" by Andre Malraux in *The Voices of Silence*.

Art historian/artist Redza Piyadasa wrote: "The existence of the National Art Gallery attests to the legitimacy of the modernist art commitment in this country."

Wrote Syed Ahmad Jamal, artist/sculptor and NAG director from 1983 to 1989: "It is one common avenue for the various races to give shape to their feelings and their visions."

Since the gallery's inception in 1958 under a Federation Arts Council-sponsored working committee, eight artists have been honoured with retrospectives. They are Peter Harris (1960), Chuah Thean Teng (1965), Datuk Hoessein Enas (1966), Cheong Soo Pieng (1967), Abdul Latiff Mohidin

(1973), Syed Ahmad Jamal (1975), Tay Hooi Keat (1983), and Ibrahim Hussein (1986).

The works in the NAG indeed signify the various developments and "isms." They reflect too the influences of the early generic caucuses (Wednesday Art Group, Penang Art Teachers' Circle, Angkatan Pelukis SeMalaysia and its breakaway rebel Anak Alam) and the aberrations – those who didn't fit into any of the schemata.

There are the pioneers like Yong Mun Sen, Chuah Thean Teng and Datuk Hoessein Enas; the School of Paris with Chinese pictorial treatment like Chia Yu-chian; the Hard-Edge of Tang Tuck Kan and Choong Kam Kow (early, before his paper pulp cultural concoctions and "trunkscapes" reliefs); the Erotic-Surrealism of Long Thien Shih; the Pop Art of Joseph Tan (early, before his undulating Dungun vistas).

The Abstract Expressionism of Syed Ahmad Jamal (early, before his ascent to the Sublime and Symbolic) and Cheong Lai Tong; the Conceptual Art of Redza Piyadasa (early, before his mock-nostalgia Ethnic-Historical Portraits); the Islamic Revivalism of Sulaiman Esa, Ahmad Khalid Yusof and Zakaria Awang (following the government's Islamisation programme in 1982); and the Back-to-Roots Tradition of Nik Zainal Abidin (first to incorporate wayang kulit tradition into painting surfaces), Mastura Abdul Rahman and Awang Damit Ahmad.

Though Ibrahim Hussein was caught in the Counter-Culture movement in the West in the '60s, he was to develop a distinct style using rhythmic calligraphic lines, while Latiff Mohidin synthesises regional vegetative (natural), mystical and polyphonic forms in his Pago-Pago icons.

Nirmala Shanmugalingam is one of the earliest to do works of sociopolitical confrontation with the immediacy and drama of real-image collages. Patrick Ng Kah Onn and Annuar Rashid work more in the mystical realm.

Dzulkifli Buyong paints childlike pictures with disturbing humour; Zulkifli Dahalan does caricatures of a Netherlike world; Lee Kian Seng is noted for his "Hammer-and-Nail" series of sculptures and mystique Nippon-Batik innovations, and Ismail Zain sets new frontiers with his Non-Painterly Distractions and his computer-printout art of Digital Collage.

However, as art has a wider spectrum in the gallery's parlance, it also collects the unique photography of Eric Peris, Ismail Hashim and Raja Zahabuddin Yaacob, the ceramics of Ham Rabeah Kamarun and Yeoh Jin Leng and fabric art of Fatimah Chik and Kalsum Muda.

But for the gallery to play a more meaningful role, especially with the rapid changes going on in the region, it will need a more forward-looking vision.

The advent of art fairs and "art auction" culture in the region with both Sotheby and Christie's setting up bases in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore is no accident.

The Pacific Century is becoming a reality with the booming economies of East Asia. A flurry of momentous art events in the '90s is giving credence to the region being the next big market.

They are the Symposium on Modernism and



"Gadis Melayu", the painting stolen from the National Art Gallery.



Post-Modernism in Asian Art in Canberra (1991), the New Art from South-east Asia touring Japan (1992), the first Asia-Pacific Triennale in Brisbane (1993), the second Asean Symposium on Aesthetics in Manila (1993), Treasures International Arts and Antiques Fair in Singapore (1993, 1994), the Contemporary Art Symposium: The Potential of Asian Thought in Japan (1994), and the 1994 Philip Morris Asean Art Awards.

Now in its 37th year, the gallery is not just a repository of art treasures. Under the National Art Gallery Ordinance 1959, it is for the presentation of art exhibitions originating locally or overseas; and the building of a permanent collection of art works.

Among other things, the gallery would have to address the problem of installation art, which has caught on among many of our young artists.

It is a sad commentary of the state of the "New Art" (term used by Ushiroshoji in the New Art From South-east Asia touring Japan) that major works, including prize-winning ones, of not-so-young artists like Wong Hoy Cheong, Zulkifli Yusof, Tan Chin Kuan, Bayu Utomo Radjikin and Fauzin Mustapha are now found in museums like the Fukuoka Art Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and also the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane. Even an art gallery in Singapore, Shenn's Fine Arts, is forking out the cash for such works.

Works in foreign collections include Zulkifli's Power II which won the Minister's Prize in the third Salon Malaysia competition in 1991/92; and Hoy Cheong's multi-media *Sook Ching* on the travails of the Japanese Occupation.

The new gallery will also have to initiate the original impetus of fringe activities of the Creative Centre when it was set up as an annexe in 1988.

The RM200,000 Creative Centre extension, converted from a garage by Chen Voon Fee, started well with exhibitions like German Walther Mertel's "flying sculptures"; Filipino Henri Cainglet's and American Betty Saar's installations, but soon it became a charade of graduation ceremonies and "social event" solo exhibitions.

For a time, the centre also held printmaking classes by Long Thien Shih and children's and adult art classes by Jame Phua.

With escalating prices of artworks, the gallery will have to depend more and more on donations and bequests to boost its collection. In The

Plundered Past, Karl Meyer wrote that "more than 80 per cent of the works the Metropolitan Museum (New York) owns ... have come to it as gifts or bequests."

The last big bequest to the NAG was by Dato Loke Wan Tho, the former Chairman of Cathay Organisation.

Clearly, we need our own Annenbergs and von Thyssens to augment the gallery's collection of 2,500 works, and with a proper new gallery, collectors could perhaps be better persuaded to give up their treasures for the benefit of all.





Members of the Operafest Children's Choir dressed in their traditional best.

Children's Choir

Little voices make it big

BY ELAINE LIM

ONG Yin Loong almost did not discover the world of music. Articulate and focused, with looks that teenyboppers would swoon over, the 18-year-old college student recalls being dragged by his mother to an audition for the Operafest Children's Choir eight years ago. He reacted with disgust. "I remember thinking... Oh God, a choir. I want taekwondo!" he says with a chuckle. "But after the first lesson, I found I liked it a lot."

NST FILE PHOTOS



Ong Yin Loong soloing it.

Ong went on to become one of the choir's star performers and still features as a soloist on its programmes. He sings praises for this hobby, which has taken him to as far as the United States and Australia with Operafest.

Operafest is the jewel in the crown of children's choirs in the country. Prolific and well-travelled, it is arguably the only such unit which puts on regular public performances at major venues in the Klang Valley.

It survived for a long time on the tenacity of its founder, the irrepressible Kam Sun-yoke, and the enthusiasm of the children and their parents.

Today, the eight-year-old choir has joined "the big league" if invita-

tions to perform overseas are any indication.

It has won awards in Wales and Holland, brought the Jerome Kerns' musical Showboat back to its home in the United States, and soothed audiences with honeyed tones in Adelaide, Athens and Macedonia.

"We have also managed to do something no other choir in the world has done before and that is to perform with the Vienna Boys Choir (which is to children's choirs what Kellogg's is to cornflakes) during their show here in 1992," Kam says.

However, as with many success stories, Operafest's climb to the top was a hard one.

"No one believed in me at first. I had to put in RM10,000 of my own savings to start with and lost RM12,000 on the first show. The big guns (potential sponsors) just showed us the door after listening to us," Kam adds.

The rehearsal venue (they didn't have any) was a lamp-lit lane in Damansara with slippers marking out the stage.

During the early years, Kam kept the children busy at home with recitals and full-fledged musicals like Papageno, Requiem, Die Fledermaus, Flower Drum Song and South Pacific.

In 1991, she decided they were ready for their baptism of fire – the International Koorfestival Holland – and the children silenced critics with third placing in the Light Music category.

Operafest is like the proverbial lotus in the pond of mud. It has flourished in an environment which does not really motivate choirs, or any art form for that matter.

It is no secret that the average Malaysian would rather watch soccer than stage plays. Corporations, whose financial support is essential for an artistic troupe to keep a regular performance schedule, politely decline when approached for sponsorship.

There seems to be lack of support from the relevant authorities as well. A check with the Ministry of Education revealed no nationwide contest for children's choirs.

This does not appear to have dampened the spirit of music enthusiasts.

Children's choirs, according to them, are alive and well in schools

and associations. The Chinese-speaking community in the Klang Valley, for example, is abuzz with such activities.

"I think there are more Chinese choirs than from other language medium. A lot of schools and associations have set up their own choirs. There are inter-district contests and others organised by the Ministry of Education, Chinese clans and various associations.

"Sometimes the children travel to other states and when there is a big enough repertoire, we will organise our own concerts," veteran choir conductor H.P. Chew says.

Most Chinese schools have their own voice teacher or hire a part-time instructor where necessary. Chew says schools and parents have become increasingly aware of the importance of music.

"Music cannot make you a bad child. You learn discipline, punctuality and cooperation because in a choir, you cannot outshine everyone else," he points out.

The demand for music teachers is so great that they end up shuttling between schools in the



Kam Sun-Yoke



Children's choirs need financial and moral support from the public.



Penang Philharmonic Choir.



All ready for Operafest's production of *Showboat*.

Klang Valley, like Hoh Kim Foong who is training three choirs simultaneously.

She says choir teachers are essentially individuals who love the art as the financial rewards are not at all attractive.

"We are not well paid. Actually, most employers treat this as a kind of voluntary service. We have invested so much in our education. If they pay better, more young people would choose this as a career," she adds.

While it is not possible to report on activities in all other states, a check with a leading vocal teacher in that cultural hub up north, Penang, revealed that all is well with children's choirs in the state.

Tung Gak Hong, who heads the Penang Philharmonic Society choir, says this can be gauged from

the high participation in singing competitions and festivals regularly organised by the Education Department and associations.

"The standard of these choirs is very high as many of our teachers are trained and they, in turn, train others. In fact, for three years at a national singing competition for children under 12, Penang emerged champion."

The veteran voice instructor is excited about the prospect of assembling a choir of 1,000 schoolchildren for the next Merdeka Day celebrations in the island state.

Trying to train a thousand young people at the same time seems like a nightmare. Surely adults, by virtue of the fact that they are ostensibly more mature, are easier to teach than children?

Kam disagrees. Since the production of *Carmen* in 1985, she has given up on older choirs.

"A child's voice is fresh. Children are also great imitators. If you tell them to interpret a song in a certain way, they will learn very quickly whereas adults are more stubborn.

"Rehearsal attendance is also very good. Adults need to be reminded all the time. About the only problem I have with my children, even when preparing for a show, are their fighting and eating habits."

Funding is a perennial problem for smaller choirs. In the same way Man cannot live on fresh air and sunshine alone, choirs thrive on more than enthusiasm. Operafest is fortunate as it now has a patron who has helped ease the financial burden. A number of its shows are sponsored and the tickets distributed free.

"We were surviving on a shoestring budget, having to depend on box-office sales. When our patron Siew Nim Chee joined us, it was like a blood transfusion," Kam says, relieved that she can now focus on things artistic and leave the administrative and financial headaches to Siew.

Chew, meanwhile, feels the press and media should be more supportive of children's choirs. Television stations, for example, could give more airtime to choirs so their standard will improve.

As Kam explains: "If there is no performance, your level will always remain mediocre. If you never venture beyond your own horizons, you are like a frog in a well."

The National Theatre, the organisation responsible for shaping our Malaysian culture, is aware that children's choirs have been left in the cold.

Its director Supiat Mukri assures that there will be a programme for children by 1996. Already, a junior choir is in existence. Furthermore, Suara Mas, the Malaysia Airline's choir which was going places before suddenly folding up, will be revived with its help.

But more important than the bureaucrats, music teachers and even the singers themselves is a group of people who can make things happen - parents.

They are the best persons to inculcate a love for music in their children which can, as Ong Yin Loong says, be a wonderful presence in their lives.

"Music is about the beautiful things in life. Although I was teased by my peers at first for getting involved, I think all that is part of living. I think it is more fulfilling to be different than to be part of a crowd because to be part of the crowd in life is not to have lived at all."

A Tradition of Excellence

Once a power to be reckoned with, Malaysian sports on the whole has declined. Greater efforts are needed to revive the tradition laid by past greats in sports who had brought much glory to the country

BY MANSOOR RAHMAN

NST FILE PHOTOS

*Thumbs up for the good old days...
Haji S.M. Omar*



APPPEARING on the TV3 programme "Cakap Cakap Bola" during the World Cup '94, FA of Malaysia's Technical Director Richard Bate said there is no such phenomenon as instant success in the world of sports.

The foundation for success, according to Bate, is built from the tradition and culture of sports in a particular country. "It takes years to build up that foundation," said Bate, a Briton on his second stint in Malaysia.

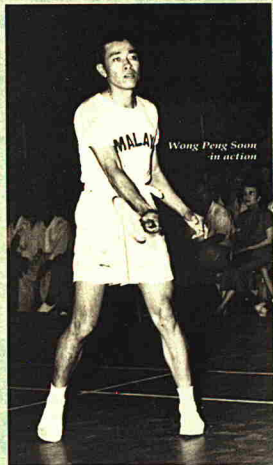
If Bate's statement needs any vindication, it came in the finals of the World Cup. Brazil, with a history in soccer unmatched by any other country, became champion for the fourth time in the series. The others who followed, including runner-up Italy and at least the quarter-finalists, were countries steeped in soccer tradition.

Bate also said that just as in soccer, the battle for world supremacy in badminton has been among countries with a solid foundation in that sport. He pointed out that a country's economic status did not matter when it came to sports, only its tradition and culture in that particular sport.

Bate thus reasoned that if any



World champs.... The Malayan team with the Thomas Cup in 1955: (from left) Leow Kim Fatt, Eddy Choong, Wong Peng Soon, Ong Poh Lim, Ooi Teck Hock, Lim Kim Fong, Tan Gin Eong



Wong Peng Soon in action

of the top countries in world soccer were to come up against Malaysia, Indonesia, China or Denmark in badminton, they would be given a severe beating because they did not have the same strong foundation and tradition in badminton.

Indonesia is the current world badminton champion with Malaysia coming second.

Among Malaysia's modern sports heritage, badminton rules supreme. The other sports include weightlifting, hockey, soccer and sepak takraw.

One man who has seen it all and can speak with authority on the matter is Haji S.M. Omar, 78, a former badminton player and official who is now leading a quiet life with his wife in Kuala Lumpur. Omar, a playing contemporary of the group that won the Thomas Cup for Malaya three times in a row from 1949, draws some satisfaction in the knowledge that the badminton culture in Malaysia is still thriving.

"Malaya was among the 11 countries which took part in the inaugural Thomas Cup competition in England to decide the world champion. The British press referred to the Malayan team as 'the little men from the East'.

"The little men won not only the first competition but the next two held in 1952 and 1955," said Omar with great relish.

As a player for Selangor, Omar shared the court with personalities like Wong Peng Soon, Ooi Teik Hock, Law Teik Hock, Yeoh Teck Chye, Chan Kon Leong, Teoh Seng Khoon, Lim Kee Fong and Ong Poh Lim - all members of

the triumphant team of 1949.

Omar was born to a poor family in Kampung Baru. He started working at 16, two years after forming the Jaya Setia Party in 1930. The party (club) is still active, although with a drastically reduced membership and funds just sufficient to keep it going.

"We love the game in those days, and we love our party," said Omar, who did not receive assistance, financial or otherwise, from the state or national association.

He is stunned by the amount of money involved in badminton today, and saddened by the attitude of players towards the game as a result of this.

"The huge sponsorships and handsome prize monies are helping badminton keep pace with the rest of world sports, but they have certainly changed the attitude of players," said Omar.

Words like training allowances, match bonuses and sponsorships were not in the vocabulary of the players of the past, he said. Only spirit, dedication and enthusiasm kept them going. They had to find their own way to the training venue and even pay for their own refreshments. "What we got was only the T-shirt we wore when we played."

However, the abundance of all that money is not all bad. Omar believes it enables the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) to do more for the future of the sport in the country and develop a reserve of players for the national team.

Omar came from a large family. Apart from him, only a sister and a brother, evergreen singer Datuk S.M. Salim, are still surviving.

The player who helped establish Malaya as a

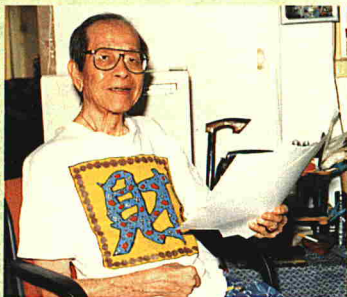


world badminton power was undoubtedly Wong Peng Soon, four-time All-England champion, three Thomas Cup finals appearances when Malaya became champion, eight-time Malayan Open champion and seven-time Singapore champion.

Beginners wishing to learn the finer points of the game, especially in mastering accuracy, watch an instructional film showing Peng Soon's training methods and playing tactics, or read books about him.

Peng Soon, a Singaporean who has also represented Johor in inter-state tournaments, is now 76 and handicapped with partial paralysis. His memory however is sharp and still retains details of the shuttle exploits of his golden years.

Also known for his prodigious fitness, Peng Soon played until he was 37, when he retained the Malayan Open title and helped Malaya win the Thomas Cup for the third time in 1955. "To this day, I'm really proud that at 37, I was able to beat the world's best and also help my country, Malaya, to its third consecutive world title in the Thomas Cup," said Peng Soon at his palatial home in Seletar Hills,



Peng Soon, now 76, remembering his shuttle exploits



Still contributing to badminton - Eddy Choong

Singapore, which he shares with his wife, eldest daughter and son-in-law. A "junior" veteran who kept the Malayan flag flying after the Peng Soon era was Penang's Eddy Choong. He joined the national team for the Thomas Cup in 1955, which was Peng Soon's final Thomas Cup appearance. Choong was also in the national line-up in 1958 and 1962, but there was no joy in these two appearances which saw the Cup won by newly rising badminton power Indonesia.

It was in the prestigious All-England championship that Choong stamped his mark, qualifying for 12 finals, winning four singles titles in 1953, '54, '56 and '57, and a hat-trick in the doubles with his brother David from 1951 to 1953. In all, Choong has won more than 400 titles, 75 of them in international tournaments spanning 12 countries.

"My greatest moment was in the 1953 All-England when I, although the youngest member of the national squad, managed to sweep both the singles and doubles titles," Choong said at his office in Penang.

Not surprisingly, the All-England is Choong's favourite tournament and he never misses watching it after retiring from the game. At first, Choong, now 64, turned his attention to coaching, including of the national squad. However, much of his time is now devoted to running his family business in Penang and serving in several voluntary organisations, including as Vice-Chairman of the Penang BA and a member of the BAM Technical Advisory Board.

His other great contribution to the sport he loves the most is the RM1 million nine-court international badminton hall he built at

Bukit Dunbar in Penang.

A Malayan pioneer in badminton was A.S. Samuel, who began his playing career in 1929 at the age of 23 after having been lured away from soccer. Now 88 and a near-recluse in his home in Petaling Jaya, Samuel was the first Malayan Open champion in 1937. He also won the doubles, partnering Chan Kon Leong.

Samuel was also the first Malayan to compete in the All-England, making the sea journey after saving for it for five years from his \$55 a month salary as a clerk in the audit department. On this tour he competed in 13 tournaments, winning eight. He was a satisfied semi-finalist in the All-England.

Samuel doesn't bother to watch the live telecasts of the Thomas Cup because it depresses him to see the "low standards." "Why should I watch the TV? What sort



Sepaktakraw gold for Malaysia in the 1990 Asian Games in Beijing

of strokes can they show us? We had better strokes those days. Rarely do we see the flick shot in today's badminton," he grumbled.

Samuel was 46 when he won four titles in the 1952 Selangor championship - the singles, doubles, and veterans' singles and doubles. He refers to this string of victories as his proudest achievement.

Samuel's wife, Cecilia, was nine times national champion, six of them consecutively from 1950. Cecilia was also Uber Cup team captain in 1956 and 1959.

The couple have played badminton for a combined total of 70 years but never together - the closest they came to being a mixed doubles pair was when they got

married in 1940! They have two sons.

A sport in Malaysia with a proud past but facing a bleak future for lack of a strong organisation is weightlifting. Next to badminton, weightlifting brought honour and prestige to the country in 1950 when a four-man team won the team title in the British Empire Games (later re-named the Commonwealth Games) in Auckland.

Koh Eng Tong and Tho Fook Hong won the feather and bantam weight gold medals to which Thong Saw Pak (lightweight) and Tan Kim Wee (light-heavy) added a silver and bronze respectively to prove wrong pre-Games predictions favouring the more established countries.

Eng Tong competed in the 1956 Olympics where he came sixth - a disappointment to him then but certainly no disgrace by today's local standards.

The sport has not looked up since then, puzzling keen followers looking for a reason.

Eng Tong, anxious to see a return of the past glory, has offered his advice and services to the national association. In December 1993, he donated two challenge trophies when he attended the national championships in Ipoh.

"I felt sorry that only medals were available for the winners. There were no trophies for the top team and top individual performer, usually known as the Champion of Champions," said Eng Tong, who was the Malayan Champion of Champions in 1959.

The new Champion of Champions challenge trophy was won by a bantamweight from Sabah, Matin Guntali. The Sabahan, who was in the national team in 1991 but was dropped in 1993, went on to win a silver medal in the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada.

The success broke a 32-year medal drought for Malaysia in the Games series - the last time Malaysia won a medal was the bronze brought back by featherweight Cheong Kam Hong from the 1962 Games in Perth, Australia. Eng Tong was so delighted by Guntali's feat that he has appealed to the Malaysian Amateur Weightlifting Federation (MAWLF) to let Guntali keep the Champion of Champions trophy for good and promised to donate a new trophy in its place.

If some of the 74-year-old Eng Tong's concern and enthusiasm rubs off on today's much younger administrators of the sports, Malaysia might be able to recapture the weightlifting distinction of the past.

The past and the present: Koh Eng Tong (right) and Matin Guntali (left) with the Champion of Champions Trophy

Malaysian hockey enjoys international standing, not only for the respect and recognition given to its officials but also for the standard of its game. A fourth placing in the 1975 World Cup held in Kuala Lumpur may be considered too new to concern a busy archivist but the foundation for that landmark achievement was laid more than two decades earlier. It began with the introduction of the inter-state championship in 1951, three years after the formation of the Malayan Hockey Council (now Malaysian Hockey Federation).

The championship aroused interest all over the country. Coaches from India were brought in at various intervals to help improve the standard. And when Malaya competed in the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne for the first time and finished eighth, the national team had staked a claim for international recognition. Following this, a 1-0 victory over the Indian Olympic team in Malacca in the last of three unofficial Tests in 1964 turned out to be a case of the pupil embarrassing the teacher.

Players like S. Selvanayagam, Aminullah Karim, Sheikh Ali, Noel Arul and Philip Sankey captured the imagination of the nation in those days, paving the way for the emergence of a new generation of players to upset defending champions Holland on their way to fourth placing in the 1975 World Cup.

The sport of the masses in this country was and still is soccer, following the inauguration of the Malaya Cup competition in 1921. Great players who became household names in those days included Dolfattah, Abdul Rahman, Chia Keng Hock, Awang Bakar, Ghani Minhat and the Pong brothers - Siang Teck and Siang Hock.



Another outstanding player was A.L. Henry, brother of badminton legend A.S. Samuel. In 1934, Henry was voted Most Popular Footballer in Malaya which earned him a trip to England, where he had the privilege of training with some professional players.

Then there was Yeap Cheng Eng, whose skills while on a tour led the China FA to include him and four other guest players in their team for the 1948 Olympics in Britain. Cheng Eng, now 74 and living in Penang, still keeps the pair of boots he wore to Wembley that year.

Like most of the players of his time, Cheng Eng was durable. He was 42 and in his 24th year with the Penang team when he led them to victory in the Malaya Cup competition. He called it quits soon after.

Among the indigenous games,

sepak takraw has been making waves for Malaysia on the international front. Since its debut in the SEAP Games in 1965 and the Asian Games in 1982, sepak takraw has brought honour to the country in keeping with its status as a national sport.

The strongest rival to date is Thailand, for whom sepak takraw also has indigenous origins. In fact, the name sepak takraw is a Malaysian-Thai combination - "sepak" from Malaysia and "takraw" from Thailand.

Although the rivalry on court has not abated, off the court the two countries have joined forces to push for the game's inclusion in international sports competitions.

E

LLA recorded her album "30110" in Los Angeles. Zainal Abidin's "Gamal" features top-notch American session musicians. M. Nasir sought the help of an Australian engineer for his album "Cang-gung Mendonan."

This recent reliance on foreign expertise for the recording of the latest albums by artistes dominating the mainstream of Malaysian music is spurred by a common desire – to reach an international audience.

Even if it only means breaking into the market in Indonesia and Singapore, big stars like Ella, Zainal and Nasir are not willing to let the opportunity to expand their fan-base pass.



Asiabeat's Lewis Pragasan.

MUSIC — Making it Beyond Malaysia

BY R.S. MURTHI

NST FILE PHOTOS

Breaking into the international music scene is a high tech, high capital, high risk venture but a few Malaysian artistes have done it

They may not have official support – they would certainly benefit from something like the Australian government's Export Music Australia, which aims to promote Australian music internationally – but these artistes have taken it upon themselves to try and bring some measure of international recognition for Malaysian music.

And now is the best time for them to test their marketability in these and other countries as the explosion of "world music" – a generic term referring to multicultural music – has blurred boundaries and deepened interest in the art forms of people from various cultures.

The fact that Zainal has undertaken successful concert tours in Japan, and is recognised for creating a kind of ethnofusion that comes under the "world music" purview, shows that Malaysia has talent of a world-class calibre.

And the work of drummer Lewis Pragasan, whose albums with Asiabeat on the Japanese label Pony Canyon are generating much



M. Nasir in concert.



interest in the West, has been consistently of a high standard, if not in performance at least in production.

There is a crucial determinant in the modest but promising international success achieved by Zainal and Pragasam's Asiabeat, now a unit with a revolving-door policy to accommodate outstanding musicians from various parts of the world. Their music, which has a Western pop base, is infused with ethnic flavours.

While they are not purely Malaysian in character, these indigenous ingredients are a major selling point. By blending them with pop and jazz, Zainal and Pragasam are creating a hybrid music that is finding wider acceptance globally.

Asiabeat may claim to be there first - Pragasam was already charting the ethnofusion course of his band in Kuala Lumpur in the early 80s. And though his vision has been somewhat corrupted by commercial considerations over the years, as attested by the glib fusion of his latest album "Monsoon" which features flamenco guitarist Ottmar Liebert, the studious drummer has done much to clear the path for others.

However, it was the emergence of "balada nusantara" in the late 80s that sparked off major enthusiasm for the marriage of pop and traditional music.

M. Nasir, a Singaporean transplanted in Malaysia, was at the forefront of the "balada nusantara" movement. He had been the domi-



Ella has much to cheer about.

Man in control - Roslan Aziz.





Zainal Abidin in the spotlight.



Fran can go international.

nant presence in Malaysian songwriting towards the end of the last decade (he still is), and in an effort to reconnect with his roots, he came out with a fusion of East and West that found its fullest expression in "Saudagar Mimpi". Gamelan-like sounds and Arabian motifs were subtly incorporated into arrangements for Western instruments.

It was not ground-breaking, but the success of "balada nusantara", which gained in popularity in the hands of more traditional-minded artistes like Sheqal, revived the careers of "asli" singers like S.M. Salim (now Datuk).

But the artistes promoting "balada nusantara", which has potential globe appeal, never saw it as anything more than a novelty vehicle.

It was Roslan Aziz, the producer and impresario behind the success of Sheila Majid (whom he subsequently married), who tapped into the world music potential of "balada nusantara" on former Headwind vocalist Zainal Abidin's debut album.

Assembling a set of original songs that were simple and folk-inflected but arranged with a touch of sophistication, Roslan set up the perfect launching pad for Zainal's solo career.

Recording the eponymous album was a long, arduous and costly affair, but Roslan is a fastidious producer whose perfectionism has reaped incredible rewards.

It is because of his obsession with quality in

production and performance that albums like Sheila Majid's "Legenda" and "Zainal" have begun gaining notice outside the country.

For "Gamal", he spared no cost - it has been reported that more than RM100,000 went into the recording, a phenomenal sum by domestic standard - in making it sound like a classy product. Besides featuring first-rate musicians, including Australian string players, "Gamal" was produced with the latest digital recording technology, making it internationally marketable. The music, which draws from diverse sources, also has a universal appeal.

That is no accident. Roslan had for a long time been striving to put Malaysia on the international music map. And though that was what he had in mind when working on Sheila's "Legenda" album, which broke into the Japanese market, it was while working on Zainal's debut that he methodically conceived of a sound that would stir broad international interest.

However, as Roslan himself has repeatedly admitted, putting together a quality production is not easy. It entails spiralling expenses and involves lengthy searches for suitable material and a long period of recording.

While Roslan is in a position to take care of hefty production bills, artistes with less leverage are compelled to work within the limitations imposed by their cost-conscious recording companies.

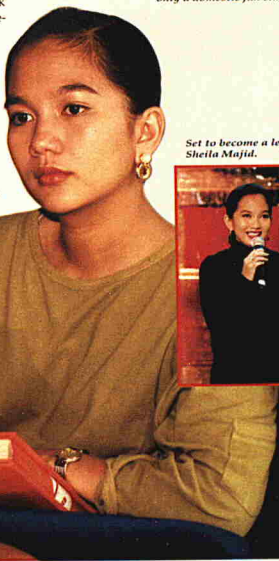
Too often, production values are compromised, resulting in poorly recorded albums featuring mediocre performances. Things are only worsened by the shoddy releases - of mainly rock - from smaller recording companies out to exploit prevalent pop trends.

Ella's immense popularity - "30110" has sold more than 200,000 copies - has afforded her the luxury of a big budget for recording, and Nasir seems to be taking the cue from Roslan.

Unfortunately, these are about the only recording artistes working towards a global goal at the moment. The others seem content with domestic success although Francisca Peter, who made an unsuccessful bid to break into the US pop scene, and Aishah, who had her first taste of commercial success as a member of the New Zealand band Fan Club, are among the singers capable of holding their own internationally. **U**



Aishah seems content with only a domestic fan club.

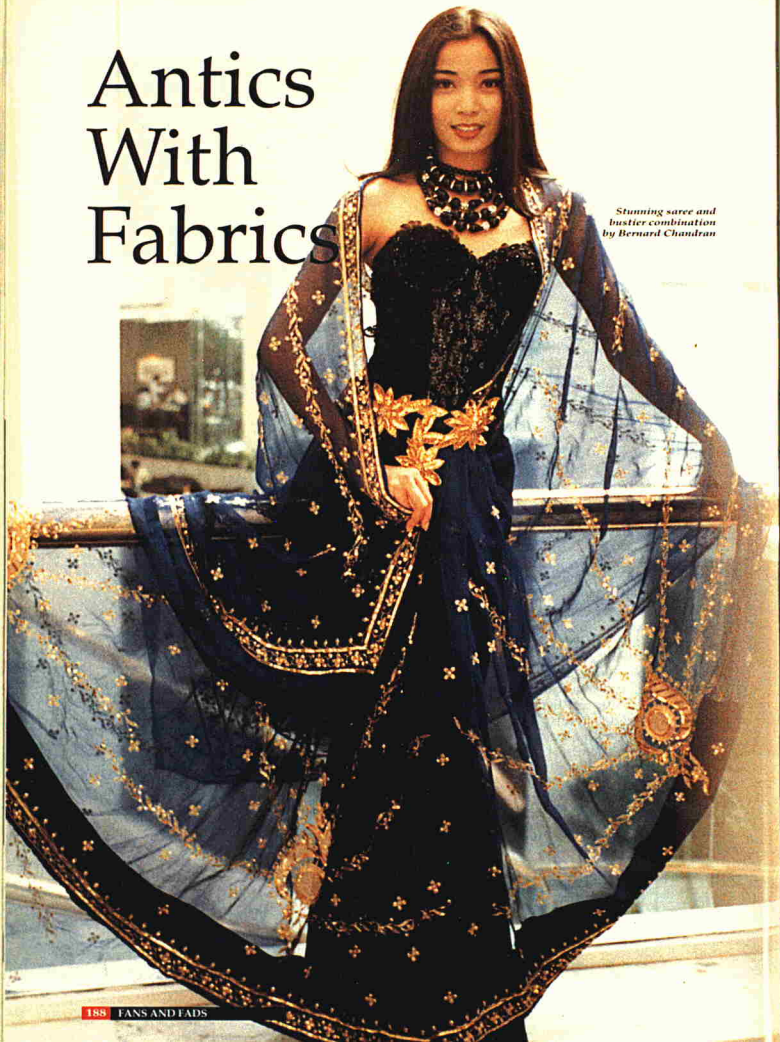


Set to become a legend - Sheila Majid.



Antics With Fabrics

*Stunning saree and
bustier combination
by Bernard Chandran*



Malaysia is like a patchwork quilt, sewn from the rich colours and textures of the many different ethnic groups. And ethnicity wears well, according to fashion designers

BY HISHAM HARUN

Photography by Ruslin Mat Tahir,
Robert Lim, Chew Kim Choo

NOT many countries can claim to having a heritage as rich and colourful as Malaysia's.

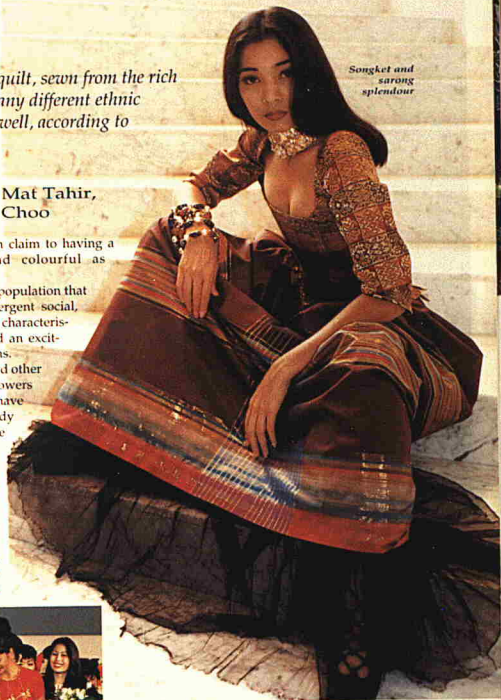
With its multiracial population that makes for widely divergent social, economic and spiritual characteristics, Malaysia is indeed an exciting potpourri of cultures and customs.

The arrival of Indians, Chinese and other migrant races, as well as colonial powers such as the Portuguese centuries ago have brought new additions to the already extensive spectrum of traditions of the Malays and other indigenous communities.

Through the ages, new lifestyles such as those of the Baba Nyonya and Mamaks have evolved and integrated into the pattern of everything Malaysian.

This unique cultural fabric has given rise to much ethnicity, a theme predicted to take the fashion world

Songket and sarong splendour



by storm next year.

A designer who has tapped into Malaysia's varied ethnic offering is Albert Yap. This Malaysian feels that with such an abundance of ethnic inspiration around, there is actually no need for local designers to look elsewhere.

Yap also believes that with some imagination, it is not impossible to produce motifs on de-



*Enchanting Pua
ensemble in chilli
red by Tom*

signs that would be well accepted internationally. He cites examples of Gianni Versace's highly successful, much copied nautical motifs and Escada's Equestrian Sport prints projected in their previous collections.

"Western designers have often used designs that are close to their hearts. We can do it too. We have all the inspiration we need right here. There are so many themes to choose from easily derived from traditional games like the Wau or Top Spinning.

"Or we could look into the different races, religions and the many cultures for design ideas," says Yap, who has over 10 years of experience in his field.

Yap's latest collection incorporated the national flower, the hibiscus, and embossed the gold

*Avant-garde
songket jacket*



motifs onto kebaya and baju kurung-inspired outfits.

"I've used the kebaya and kurung silhouette in most of my 12 new pieces but gave them a more contemporary styling to provide for a blend of the oriental and Western."

Among Yap's creations are also outfits with a lot of Chinese influence (frog buttons and chinoiserie slits) and Indian touches (saree) in them.

Most of Yap's elegant works this time around are seen in black and white cocktail outfits ranging from dresses to skirts of all lengths, sarong skirts, bustiers, bolero, jackets and overcoats in organza, lace and velvet.

Sharing Yap's views is Fatimah Abang Saufi, better known as Tom. For many years now, Tom has been concentrating on the Pua Kumbu, a prominent design feature on Iban traditional and ceremonial outfits.

"There is a beautiful ethnicity in the Pua that is most unique. And being Sarawakian, it was only natural that I would start off with the Pua," she says.

"Our designers don't need to look anywhere else for inspiration. It's all here. We have the different 'tikar' motifs, the songket, the 'tembikar' and many other motifs we can project.

"I have heard that international designers like Ralph Lauren are looking in this direction for new ideas. They too realise there is more ethnicity here than in any other part of the world."

Tom reveals that the first time she used Pua motifs on cotton and silk in 1986, the reception was cool. "They were not too receptive back then. I guess I was a little too early for the market."

But now her designs are selling like hot cakes. Her Pua on knitwear, introduced during last





The selendang goes Pua print

Brown has never looked better

year's "Shopping Week" celebrations, was a hit with the crowd.

Tom's latest Pua prints, which have become a kind of signature motif for her, are seen on long skirts, long dresses, vests, hanging jackets, cardigans, selendang and other fashion pieces.

Through her latest line, Tom has proven that blending earth tones and matte colours such as beige and dull red, green or purple can actually be a highlight in itself. Her designs are certainly East meets West at its best.

She is currently working with top London-based shoe designer, Jimmy Choo, to produce Pua-knit stilettos. Choo's clientele includes Princess Diana, the Queen of Jordan and supermodel Elle McPherson, apart from many other rich and famous personalities.

Up and coming designer Syarifah Kirana Syed Ghazali was much praised for her Baba Nyonya collection featured during the recent Jelita Benang Emas Awards.





Zang Toi's green wrap-around Wayang Kulit skirt

This Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM) fashion graduate had come out with a wholesome Baba Nyonya look complete with accessories that included shoes, berets, bags, the whole works. It didn't matter that she did not win. Her superb collection became the talk of the town even way after the competition.

A top designer who has just begun using local fabric on international silhouettes is Michael Ong. Ong who has a penchant for detailed beadwork, has transferred this skill onto songket, the country's favourite gold and silver-threaded cloth.

"I just wanted to try my beadwork on songket and I'm overwhelmed by the results. For a more contemporary look, I have set dazzling stones amidst Italian gold-lace on some of my outfits."

New York-based Zang Toi too is smitten by the songket and intends to include it in his forthcoming collection. "I once made a pair of shorts in black and gold songket and the people there loved it immensely.

"Malaysia certainly has lots of ethnicity to offer and the Western world just adores all things ethnic and exotic. My last 'wayang kulit' collection consisting of skirts, blouses and dresses was a best seller. So were my batik and leather-mixed mini skirts," he says.

Bernard Chandran who has just returned from Paris is yet another designer who loves the songket fabric. In his latest collection, he used songket to design avant-garde jackets, skirts, vests and puffed sleeve corset-like tops that came with tenun sarong and nettings for a dash of drama.

The designer has also used gold-embroidered saree fabric to match his sequined corsets and bustiers. And these designs spell elegance in simplicity.

Leung Thong Ping has always been known for her delightful batik cheongsams, and baju kurung and Baju Kedah-inspired contemporary motifs.

"I get all excited about modern trends; yet what draws me most is the form and structure of traditional clothes.

"I feel comfortable designing the kind of clothes I make. If you are comfortable with your

Black and gold contemporary kebaya with hibiscus detailings



Yap's off-white organza ensemble with a hint of kebaya in a modern cut

cultural style, you make a strong statement of your identity," says Leung who frequently uses batik sarung, Indian cotton and Chinese linen in her creations.

Leung reveals that her 1995 Hari Raya collection will feature the kebaya labuh-inspired jackets with tiny antique-looking buttons. "I can see these jackets over sarong, pants or long slim skirts."

She too agrees that her outfits are popular with both locals and foreigners because of the unique blend of ethnicity which she has cleverly and tastefully infused in all her designs. And from where does she get all her ideas? Malaysia of course.



A source of wealth from the agricultural sector.



BY SYED ADAM ALJAFRI

Past, Added to Present, Equals Our Future



Symbol of democracy – Parliament House.

A witty and thought-provoking discourse on how development has brought changes. Examining the mathematics of it, Syed Adam concludes that cultural heritage plus economic progress does not necessarily result in an even sum

Photography by Azlan Nain,
Kaharuddin Samad, Mohamad
Ikram Ismail, Shahrul Azhar
Shahbudin, Aida



The visible face of economic prosperity.

THE battle of economic development versus cultural heritage is being fought daily with greater intensity as the country grows. An unbalanced outcome would result in a skewed future society in Malaysia, either all materialistic or mired in nostalgia for the past. How are the battle lines being drawn up?

Over a millenium ago, the continental Indians and the Chinese, and the peninsular Arabs of West Asia brought export forms of their civilisations to this country. We peacefully absorbed religion, creative skills of art, music and literature, new techniques of crafts and songket-making, different technologies (shipbuilding, metalwork, house construction, use of stone in place of wood and bamboo), and new ideas in various social influences that strengthened family life and enriched kinship ties and community loyalties.

Spirituality and aesthetic values were very high amongst the people at all levels and in a wide range of occupations. Behaviours were shaped by ethical relation-



ships; rulers protected the people who, in turn, expressed deep loyalty.

The blood ties of parents and children, and equally so the ties to grandparents on both sides, uncles and aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces were matched by secular and spiritual bonds to God, the community and the state. Good conscience prevailed to right wrongs and to deal with anti-social behaviour. Community and kampung cooperation marked the age.

Yesterday, according to the idealists, was good (ignoring life's little inconveniences such as widespread disease, short lifespans, attacks by wild beasts, natural disasters, tyranny, sneak ambushes, piracy, wars). Everything blossomed, they believed, and the mixed heritage brought forth new flowerings even as the immigrant peoples arrived in waves 100-200 years ago.

Then British imperium arrived in trading ships armed not only with cannon but the power to impose other ideas and ways. A material world opened up, dislocating established systems and attitudes.

Tin-mining productivity jumped with mechanical applications. New cash crops of gambier, pepper, tapioca (cassava) and copra flourished. Along came rubber and oil palm plantations, straight-rowed sentinels of new wealth, not only for the British in the past, but also for many of us.

The nature of work changed, and with it, workers' attitudes and ways. Cash money became the key. Physical development was phenomenal, especially over the past two decades, in ways and at rates never before experienced here.

Roadways, train tracks, later airlines breached the isolation of communities. Change accelerated as traditions were overrun.

As a girl, my mother used to go from Kuala Kangsar to school in Taiping by bullock-cart "express" along narrow, twisting jungle trails which followed the contour line. One night was spent at midpoint around a campfire, to keep off tigers, black panthers and wild boars (the ubiquitous mosquito prevailed, however, and malaria raged, killing many in the prime of life).

It took her two days to cover the 40-odd miles (65 km) at an average three mph.

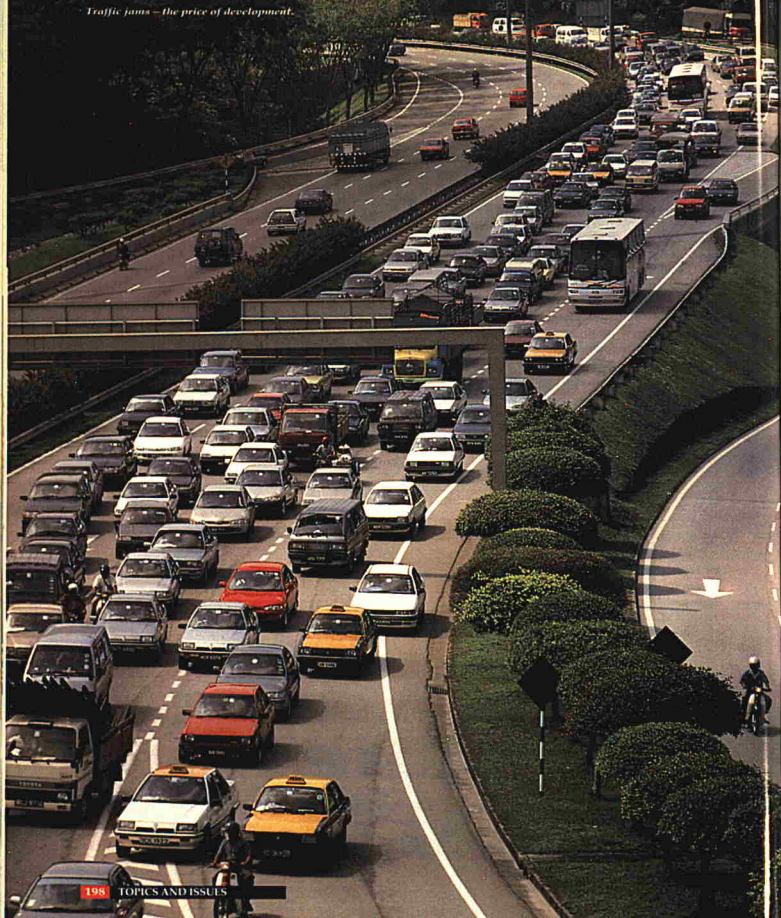
I can drive the 380 kilometres or 240 miles from Kuala Lumpur to the Penang Bridge along the PLUS superhighway in about three hours at 110 kph, or fly to Penang in 40 minutes at 560 kph (haze permitting). Is life better? Yes – and no.

On the road I must keep off, not untutored wild beasts but their



The advent of railway opened up a cheap mass transportation mode in the country.

Traffic jams – the price of development.





Discos are in.

contemporary "civilised" counterparts: speed maniacs bent on suicidal ways that murder innocents, dangerous roadhogs with "kopi-o" licences, and wild lorries and tankers ready to chew me up.

Life has seemingly changed, but the dangers remain and so nothing has changed. Disaster potentials only increase. Worst of all are the invisible mental changes (not necessarily for the better) and psychological risks.

We seek desperately to cram more activity into the same fixed number of daily hours – golf (rub shoulders with the big fellows), yachting (the latest executive fad at the top), private executive aircraft (swooshing to fame and riches beyond belief), long corporate meetings (not always about business).

The models come from TV and films, Jeffery Archer and (now out of fashion) Harold Robbins.

Granted the lengthened lifespan (from 40 years to around 70 now), is it worth what a leading Malaysian psychiatrist terms the "hurry, worry and curry" syndrome?

Pause and gird your loins for new battles in physical development versus spiritual heritage.



Cultural shows.

Physical things dominate. The pace of life has changed (some say worsened), gifting us with advanced-society diseases – heart problems (not the romance kind), cardiac failure, allergic reactions, cancers, arthritis, insomnia, lupus, burnout symptoms, overweight, mental disturbances, new resistant forms of 'flu virus shortened temper fuses, less time for courtesies and polite traditional consideration for others.

Mortality beckons, and those lacking spirituality and disdainful of "old-fashioned ways" look away.

We forget. The wayang kulit has passed its Jurassic Age. Chinese classic opera (Guangchow, Fujian, Chiu Chow forms) struggles to survive in the smaller suburbs and villages as the cinema and TV beckon. Keris makers, rather than the keris themselves, become precious, maybe soon extinct.

In their place, the younger generations seek mass identity and conformism at karaoke lounges, dance the wild nights out at discos, and view videotapes smuggled and with uncensored doubtful moral messages. The doubts are not theirs but their elders'.

The oldies meanwhile survive on a diet of historically (and hysterical) exaggerated videos and kung fu pseudo epics.

Many agree that the important government messages on radio and TV (importuning, for example, against foolish behaviour and loose morals that can lead to AIDS, and using dikir barat forms and patriotic songs endlessly repeated) leave only, at best, a pale passing impression: heard/seen today, gone tomorrow (boring, lah!).

Yet not all the beneficent values have been lost or forgotten. The battle goes on, renewed yearly.

Literally hundreds of thousands flocked last year to a major exhibition of Islamic civilisation even while others gaped at de Beer's diamond collection displays and vie to be invited to Sotheby's art auction "shows."

There is a definite thirst for knowledge about the artifacts and ways of past greatness, and for lessons to be drawn from such great achievements.

At the same time, the average Malaysian is jockeying for the closest car park to the National Museum and Islamic Centre, loath to walk more than necessary and examining the new car for scratches afterwards. "Sayang kereta lebih pada orang?"

"Cold wars" have been known to start over a small bump that left no marks. Thus the lust for the material.

Is this the lifestyle we consciously seek? Fat cats in dark-glassed cars offer not-so-innocent young girl "bohshias" lifts to perdition. Vultures disguised as breakdown tow trucks patrol for car carcasses to rip off. A man of metallurgical skills, undoubtedly, finds a shallow alchemy for making copper into "gold"; worse, he finds fools who think it is cut-price gold.

By contrast, the "lepak" culture is innocuous. "Standing in the complexes waiting for something to come by", to paraphrase the old song: harmless, but vacuous, a detribalised loitering which demolishes family ties (why?).

"Urbanising values" wrench traditional beliefs away. The resultant gap is filled by alienating, mostly imported, attitudes that negate centuries-old ways. Customary peace of mind is shattered by the anguished search for materialism, generating beggar-thy-neighbour indifference to the plight of others.

The dream for a bigger (costlier) car every few years, a second car for the wife (maybe for the mistress?), destructively "renovating" perfectly sound buildings good for 100 years more, competing to be upmarket in the executive sweepstakes, spending "plastic money" recklessly and juggling the payments, wearing designer everything from eyeglasses to underwear at

A young boy learns an old art: making "tasbeeh" or prayer beads.



A demonstration on making the mantle that covers the Ka'aba.



An Islamic civilisation exhibition attracted a huge crowd.

NST FILE PHOTOS

fabulous prices and boasting about affordability (even as the debts grow), murder the spirit of otherwise smart people.

The latest waste of time, but oh, so fashionably, is to wait 30 minutes or more for a parking space at Carrefour's hypermart, newest venue of the "in" crowd. Would that they queue up in such numbers for cultural shows and in places of worship!

Still, all is not lost. The public-spirited newspapers organise charity Big Walks, and the corporate sponsors come through with handsome sums for the needy: the aged, the homeless, those in hospices in life's last stage, the handicapped, the disadvantaged. Syabas!

No less a person than the Minister of Finance organises poetry readings attended by top corporate executives; may the poetry filter down the ranks!

The allegations of corrupt "fixing" in sports can be offset by the rise of corporate donations, in cash and kind, to worthy charities.


Ethical morality, the corporate conscience, good corporate citizenship must inevitably expand in rippling circles, providing a re-examination of our lasting Asian family values (mummy and daddy may be tax exemptions but, so far, not gramps).

We do not need to import morality, spiritual awareness, religiosity. We have these in abundance as part of our heritage. Now is the time to win the battle for balance between temporal and spiritual.

If we practise being a truly caring society, helping our neighbour (who may be a stranger whose car has broken down), if we infuse more real emphasis on morality and religious values in our educational curricula all the way from kindy to university graduates, we can balance increasing personal wealth with greater peace of mind by bringing our precious heritage to the very forefront once again.

We have magnificent possibilities of synergies from our multiracial, polycultural, diverse religious heritage where these all come to a focus on common values.

And, although we are a small nation, I am reminded of the motto that my headmaster father gave his school in Batu Gajah: "Much in Little."

We may yet in all humility be exemplar to the rest of the world. 

Writer and reviewer **Syed Adam Aljafri** passed away on November 3 1994. He grew up in the small town of Batu Gajah, Perak, and had witnessed the changing imbalances of life from his various vantage points as Adviser in Bank Negara, Founding Professor of Economics and Management at the University of Samoa and director of public-listed corporations and a private college.



The leadership in conference to tackle the outbreak of riots on May 13 1969.

AFTER almost four decades of Independence, Malaysia can look back with satisfaction on a track record of success acknowledged by even its most fervent critics.

The success covers a wide range of activities over numerous fields, with the economic growth rate being the most widely-quoted example.

However, economic growth is by no means the only yardstick. Alongside it are other successes including price stability, drastic reduction of poverty, greater equity, ability to attract foreign investment, racial harmony and economic and political security.

This is not to say there had been no problems. History would show that it had been a hard and rocky road for a young nation in the making.

The problems were not only numerous but worse, of a contentious nature such as questions of race, religion, regional disparity and even ideological hostility. But like the phoenix rising from the ashes of its defeat, the country was able to overcome the setbacks each time, bouncing back stronger and better, with renewed hope and vigour.

What kept the country going and enabled it to progress was the way in which the problems were tackled. This has been the outstanding accomplishment of

Malaysia in the 37-odd years since Independence. This feature is what distinguishes Malaysia from a host of other countries which had failed to resolve the problems they encountered.

Some of the problems Malaysia successfully tackled were the citizenship issue, the Emergency, Confrontation, Dual Economy, racial riots of May 1969, the recession and discouraging investment climate of 1985-1988 and the deficits in government finances and balance of payments (the twin deficits).

Of all the problems faced by the country, the 1969 riots were without doubt the most serious. The riots broke out within only six years of the formation of Malaysia and two years of the ending of Confrontation. The occurrence was serious as it had racial overtones. And as we all know, racial or inter-community conflicts are the most intransigent of all problems. The 1969 riots coincided with

violent sectarian outbreaks in Northern Ireland, which still plague the British territory.

As with all major historical events, there are many theories as to the causes of the riots. Historians have the luxury of time to study and interpret the events. The decision-makers, however, had to determine on the spot what the causes were and provide the necessary solutions.

The Malaysian leadership took decisive steps to quell the riots while addressing their long-term causes. Even today, the decisiveness, ingenuity and sense of justice with which the leaders of that time carried out their task stand out as an example of responsive leadership.

The first major step taken was the restoration of order and the assurance of security for every citizen. This necessitated the imposition



Security forces on the alert for any trouble.



The Malaysian Tradition of Challenge & Response

BY MOHD RIDZUAN
ABDUL HALIM



PHOTOS BY AZLAN NAIN



of emergency rule and the suspension of Parliament. Second to be tackled was political stability. Among the various measures undertaken were the formation of the Federal Territory, strengthening of rural weightage, stricter sedition laws, the passing of entrenched constitutional provisions and strengthening of the police force. Third was the restructuring of the economy under a 20-year New Economic Policy (NEP). It had as its basic thrust the development of a Bumiputera corporate sector and the elimination of identification of race with economic function.

The NEP constituted perhaps the most controversial and creative aspect of the policy changes that took place after 1970. The

A look at the post-Independence performance of the country – the problems resolved, the challenges overcome and the successes achieved

post-May 1969 leaders realised that the pre-1970 policy of rural development was not adequate in that the rising expectations of Bumiputeras as well as the opportunities for them lie in the urban, industrial corporate sector. Under the NEP, quantitative and qualitative targets were set, various programmes launched and numerous new institutions established.

There was also a fair degree of experimentation involved in the NEP: programmes and institutions which were less successful were abolished or scaled down while those which proved effective were emphasised, expanded and duplicated.

The post-1969 policies and programmes were, by and large, successful. Contrary to earlier criticisms, the policies were carried out in an objective and evenhanded manner. Parliamentary sovereignty was restored as soon as possible. The sedition and politically restrictive laws were applied fairly across the board. The NEP, which was basically affirmative action, was implemented to facilitate overall economic

growth while avoiding any form of confiscation or compromise with private property rights.

Twenty years after the riots, the country had succeeded in building a secure economic foundation for all its citizens. Rapid economic growth was achieved with drastic reduction in the poverty level. The objectives of racial as well as sectoral restructuring were accomplished. Many countries facing the issue of racial economic equality have good reason to seriously examine the NEP and its applicability to their own situation.

However, with one challenge over, another now loomed for the country – the recession which dragged on from 1985-1987. A major contributor was the slow pace of foreign investments in Malaysia. Exacerbating this was the widely-held perception that Malaysia's investment climate was poor, particularly in comparison with its immediate neighbours.

I still remember an important investment seminar held in Kuala Lumpur in 1988. The topic was something like "What is wrong with Malaysia's investment climate". The newly-appointed Minister of Trade and Industry was invited to address and declare open the seminar.

their negative outlook and to once more have confidence in the economy. Happily for everyone, the government's message eventually prevailed. Most of the early birds among the local investors gained handsome profits from the investment commitments made during the recession years.

Next was the matter of burgeoning government expenditure and a bloated public sector. It was the conventional wisdom after the Second World War that government spending was good and necessary. The Fabian and Keynesian inspired economists were highly partial to government expenditure and generally favoured an increasing role for the public sector in the economy.

Such a trend was also an easy way out for most democracies. It was a staple diet for the government of the day to assume greater responsibilities and wider duties over all aspects of economic life. In many countries it even led to nationalisation and welfareism.

Malaysia too did not escape from such conventional wisdom. A combination of factors led to a rapid and persistent increase in the absolute and relative size of the public sector from Independence right up to the mid-80s.

Greater public investment and expenditure were seen as the solution to all the economic and social ills of the country. And for a time it looked as though we could well afford it. The late 70s and early 80s were a time of very high oil prices and Western commercial bankers were rushing to lend to Latin American countries, what more "financial conservatives" such as Malaysia.

The combination of increasing government expenditure and thus government budget deficits together with considerable foreign borrowings from foreign commercial banks nearly managed to put the country on the road to economic disaster. The collapse of oil prices and slowdown of the early 80s revealed to everyone the



Government efforts to make Malaysia an attractive investment choice have paid off.

When she found out about the topic, she abandoned her prepared text and instead proceeded to address the organisers on the choice of such a topic. In her opinion, the topic was totally negative in outlook and she commented that "...with such views predominant amongst Malaysian industrial leaders themselves, you don't need any competitors..."

To me, the episode illustrated well the sentiment prevailing in those times and revealed several lessons. First, it reflected the negative investment climate prevailing as late as 1988 and the even more negative "perceived investment climate." Second, the topic chosen I must say did reflect the sentiment of many industrialists at that time. Third, there was a very wide chasm between the views and expectations of the corporate and the government leaders at that time. While corporate leaders were pessimistic and anxious to find fault, government leaders were optimistic and had a "can do" outlook.

It was a major government achievement to drag the private sector out of its pessimism and dispel the prevalent negative outlook. It involved much hard work.

Apart from having to vie with extremely competitive neighbours for direct foreign investment, the government also had the even more daunting task of persuading local investors and bankers to reverse

grave weaknesses of excessive public expenditure and a high public debt.

The strategy needed to get the nation out of its predicament was simple enough: reduce government expenditure thus reducing government borrowings, and simultaneously encourage private investment while privatising various government departments.

The political will needed for its implementation, however, was another matter. The drastic reversal in government policy needed very strong political commitment. It proved to be an extremely unpopular act and was only achieved through the courage of the country's political leadership.

The Finance Minister of the day had to absorb and overcome heavy political pressure in implementing the budget cuts necessary to reduce government borrowings. Not many people realised that had the government not reduced its foreign currency loans, in particular the Yen loans of the early 80s, both the government and the economy would have suffered incalculable damage from the Yen appreciation following the Plaza Accord.

Reducing government expenditure and the size of the public sector was only one part of the solution. The other part was the introduction of the Malaysia Incorporated concept and the privatisation programme. Malaysia Incorporated was introduced in the early 80s to impress upon all Malaysians, particularly the corporate sector and the civil service, the importance of working together and avoiding unnecessary conflicts which only serve to undermine the nation's overall economic progress and development.

The privatisation programme had even greater implications for the country as a whole. It formed part of the policy to reduce the size of the public sector and with this, the burden on the tax payer. It was also a means to introduce modern management practices and corporate structures into the previously

bureaucratically organised public enterprises and utilities. By and large, the privatisation programme proved to be highly successful.

It has since gained widespread acceptance among employees, the stock market and client groups. Privatisation of the North-South Highway which faced numerous teething problems has since convinced the public of its worth following the rapid completion of the much needed highway and the superior maintenance and services provided to users.

The privatisation of the two main utilities, power and telecommunications, as well as the container port terminal proved to be runaway successes, featuring remarkable efficiencies, innovation and profitability. These corporations emerged as stock market darlings and contributed significantly to the deepening and development of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange itself.

Malaysia had proved to be among a handful of countries that had succeeded in actually reducing government deficits and borrowings. It was no mean feat for a democratically elected government to convince the public of the need to reduce government investment and spending.

Its success in this area provided a paradigm to other developing



The key lies in sound economic and monetary policies.

countries seeking a solution to the universal problem of combating government expenditure increases while trying to introduce cost efficient practices in public enterprises and utilities.

Having seen through the New Economic Policy (1971-90) to its completion, diversification of the economy, industrialisation, growth of foreign investment and the development of the capital market, the decision-makers had to address themselves to new problems and situations facing the nation.

The world out there is changing fast. The development of new technologies, particularly in telecommunications, robotics, new materials and genetic engineering threatens traditional industries while spawning new ones. The political and social changes are no less complex as witnessed in the expansion of existing trading blocs and the creation of new ones, the demise of communism and the prospect of greater violence in the world scene.

On the domestic front, the country could not afford to continue having racial categorisation as the cornerstone of its economic and social policies. While there is a continuing need for affirmative action programmes, the success achieved from the NEP together with the rapid development of the economy called for a different set of policies

for the turn of the century and beyond.

Following a comprehensive and widespread review of the NEP and existing policies and programmes, Malaysia's decision-makers decided that new approaches needed to be adopted for the period beyond 1990. Instead of a 20-year perspective as in the NEP, a 30-year perspective (1991-2020) was adopted this time.

The Malaysian leadership also recognised that Malaysia's future will continue to be inextricably tied with developments in the world economy. After all, Malaysia owes much of its prosperity to its strong relationship with the world economy for its imports, exports and investments.

Such dependence on the outside world, however, poses both problems and opportunities. The opportunities can only be realised if Malaysia can retain and intensify its productivity and competitiveness.

This realisation has led to the leadership's continuing emphasis on the need to upgrade productivity through increased investment in both physical and human capital.

Education, particularly technical education, is given great emphasis as part of Vision 2020. At the same time, Malaysia could not continue to rely on low and middle technology industries which had helped us greatly in the 1970s and 1980s. The country has to pursue new types of industries and technical skills over the next three decades.

Another notable policy departure is the downplaying of racial categorisation



PHOTO BY KAHARUDDIN SAMAD

tion. This is in recognition of the rapid development achieved by the Bumiputeras over the NEP period as well as of the need for fresh approaches for the future.

The emphasis over the next three decades will be based more on a national approach with less stress on racial lines. Racial

categorisation however will not be abandoned as the original objectives of the NEP have still to be fully achieved. Greater importance will be given to policies specially targeted at poverty and various specific social problems existing within the various communities.

National integration will continue to be a major focus. Although the degree of law and order achieved has been most remarkable as witnessed by the absence of racial animosities and elimination of armed insurrection, there is still much to be done in this area.

The leadership is concentrating on a multi-pronged approach to promote greater national and social integration. The development of a tolerant, liberal and enlightened society is emphasised. Genuine joint ventures in economic enterprises across racial lines is the objective and not mere semblance of inter-racial cooperation as practised in the Ali Baba ventures at one time.

Another important approach adopted is Malaysia's new assertiveness in foreign affairs. This new assertiveness is a reflection

of our own success in tackling domestic problems and the realisation that we have a genuine contribution to make to the world.

Following the rejection of the old ideological baggage of communism, welfarism, military dictatorships and unbridled liberalism, many countries have found that there are no takers for such well-worn messages. It is in this ideological vacuum that Ma-

PHOTO BY SALEH OSMAN



Peering into a high technology future.



Malaysia's message of justice, honesty and a fair deal for small countries represent a breath of fresh air. With its harmonious multiracial, multireligious society, consistent economic growth and enviable record of low inflation, Malaysia provides a shining example of what a small country could do within the present family of nations.

Malaysia strongly rejects the attempts of certain Western interest groups to impose their values upon the rest of the world. Some of the strong-arm tactics adopted by such groups border on a revised form of colonialism.

Malaysia's active efforts in the international sphere are also significant for its own people. Domestically, it serves to increase local awareness of the outside world and provide a constant reminder of our dependence on it as well as the opportunities and challenges posed by external markets and competition.

For the smaller less developed countries, Malaysia's efforts provide them with a voice which they themselves might not be able to muster due to overdependence on the West. At the same time these less developed countries can learn from Malaysia's example as to what could be achieved from the adoption of democracy together with economic equity and the practise of sound economic and monetary policies.

Malaysia's Vision 2020 clearly reflects the proactive and long-



armed insurrection which had also been successfully tackled and which were not touched here. And as time progresses, new challenges will arise. Some of the serious challenges today include the drug problem, public housing, mass transit, illegal immigration and the general need for better regulatory enforcement.

Over the whole gamut of past and present problems, a few golden threads in the Malaysian approach can be discerned. The Malaysian leadership does not leave matters to chance. Whether the problem is pollution or polarisation, it will be faced squarely.

Studies are conducted to identify the root cause of each problem. The necessary legislations are passed when needed. Appropriate policies are adopted and the government machinery is engaged in its implementation. Where

necessary, the government machinery is reoriented to ensure its continuing effectiveness and relevance to meet new challenges. This had been the case with the introduction of Malaysia Incorporated wherein a massive reorientation and re-examination of the government machinery was undertaken.

Such has been the Malaysian tradition, a tradition of challenge and response. The formula has worked well for the country so far and we trust it would also see us through to the year 2020.



term view adopted by our leaders. We do not just wait for problems to arise. We look ahead and try to formulate our policies accordingly. If the past is any guide, the next 30 years should also prove as fruitful as the record achieved in the last 20 years.

There are of course other major challenges, such as the

AGEING is not exactly a hot dinner conversation topic. In fact, for most people, they would rather not talk about it at all, whatever the circumstances. However, like it or not, the clock of life does not stop ticking. Sooner, rather than later, the twilight years will be before us.

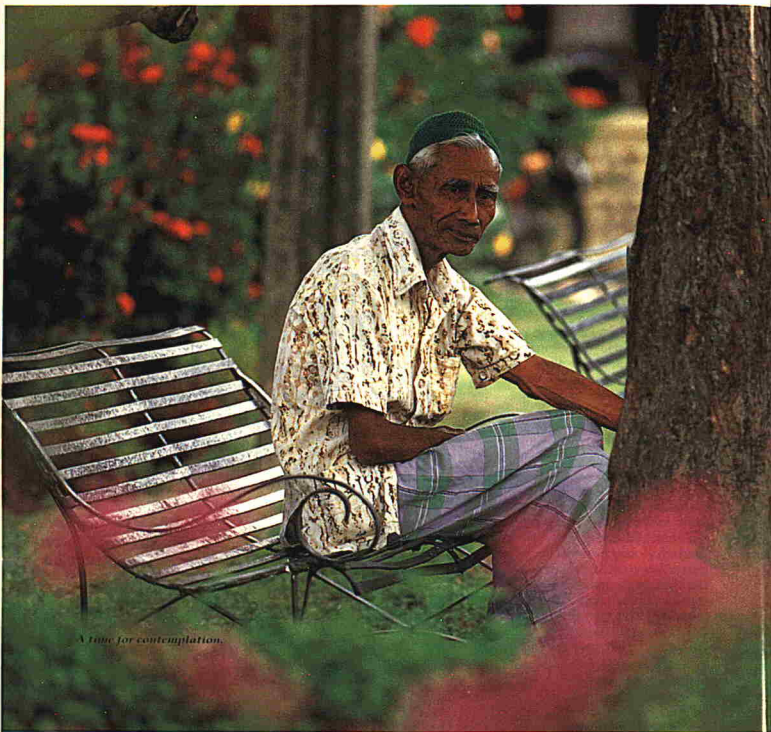
What would we do then? How would society take it?

As individuals age, so do societies. From a youthful stage in which the young predominate, it moves gradually towards maturity and from there to a final stage of ageing in which the number of elderlies begins to increase to a significant size.

Internationally, a population is

considered ageing when seven per cent or more of its members are 65 years or older. Malaysia is expected to reach this critical threshold at about the same time it achieves industrialised status by 2020 or within about one generation.

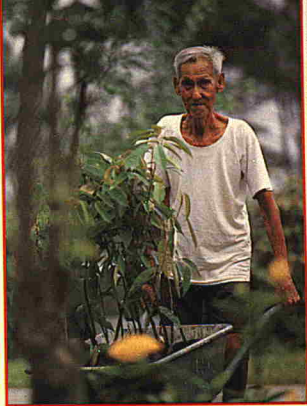
Incidentally, the convergence of the two events will not be due entirely to chance. The drive to industrialise has compelled the



A time for contemplation.

local society to modernise and urbanise at an unprecedented rate, especially in the last two decades or so.

Rapid societal development resulting from combined industrialisation, modernisation and urbanisation has resulted in a remarkable improvement to the standard of living and the overall quality of life of Malaysians.



Old Age

Age is in the mind, the trick is to keep it from creeping down to the rest of the body, so says a wag. But we can't stop the process of ageing; we can, however, do something about its problems and consequences

BY HARUN DERAUH
Photography by Saleh Osman



The sweeping changes have brought about some highly profound and irreversible consequences to the structure of the national population. The birth rate took a dramatic downturn. Our Total Fertility Rate (TFR) fell from 6.83 just before Independence to 4.00 by 1990.

Likewise, the death rate also declined. From 8.7 per thousand population in 1980, the Crude Death Rate (CDR) fell sharply to 5.0 per thousand population by 1993.

The decline in rates of birth and death was accompanied by prolongation of life on account of a higher living standard and the generally better health and living conditions. Life expectancy at birth for Peninsular Malaysia increased from 64.3 in 1970 to 69.5 years for males and 73.9 years for females.

With fewer births and deaths and with a longer lifespan, the proportion of the elderly in the population began to increase, gradually at first, but accelerating at a much faster rate subsequently.

It is projected that from 1950 to 2020, while the total Malaysian population will grow by about five times, those 60 and over will multiply by nearly nine times or almost twice as fast.

For the 65 and above age group, while it comprises only about four percent of the present population, it is projected to grow to seven percent by 2020.

In absolute terms, while the age category of 60 and above totalled 1.8 million in 1991, this figure is expected to grow to about 2.4 million by the year 2000.

However, it is not just growth in the number of the aged that is a cause for worry. Insofar as this number translates into a major burden for the economically active group to bear, it will remain a major social concern. The heavier the dependency, the more it will strain the resources of our productive labour force.

As the elderly multiply in number, one other major worry

that is frequently expressed has to do with the erosion of the extended family system that traditionally has been the most vital and enduring source of economic, social and emotional support for the elderly.

With greater adoption of modern values and lifestyles that emphasise Western freedom and individualism, the extended family that used to shelter comfortably at least two or more generations under one roof is now becoming less and less fashionable. The trend today is for adult offsprings to set up their own households soon after marriage.

A family survey by the Statistics Department in 1984/85 found that 70 percent of Malaysian families were already nuclear units with just

the father, mother and children. That was nine years ago. By now this percentage must have grown even bigger.

The other major trends that could have also affected the elderly adversely include the rapid and selective out-migration of the young from the rural areas, thereby ultimately leaving behind ageing parents to survive in the tough and often physically demanding life in the kampungs, and the rapid absorption of women into the national labour force.

By 1993, the percentage of women in the nation's labour force (15-





64 years) had reached 48 percent from 35.3 percent in 1980. With more and more of them taking up fulltime jobs, their traditional role as the most reliable and consistent care-givers for the aged could very well be left in abeyance.

In the light of these pervasive changes, the most pertinent question that one needs to ask is simply: What will happen to the aged? The best possible answer, perhaps, is to have society develop a comprehensive policy to ensure the aged would remain reasonably healthy, active and useful.


At the individual level, the ideal is to encourage and assist the elderly to plan their retirement carefully ahead so that they would be entirely prepared when the golden years arrive. This way, they will be able to live independent and fulfilling lives to the end. With more people retiring with better education and more generous means, the chances of promoting this on a national scale are excellent.

Family support, however, remains critical for the aged, even for those who are healthy and financially comfortable. There are psychological and emotional needs that only the family can give. For those unable to care for themselves because of ill health or economic reasons, the family is often the only refuge.

For this reason, social behaviour and public policy should emphasise the imperative of strengthening family relations, especially between grown-up offsprings and ageing parents. Every incentive and encouragement should be given to family members to interact closely and cherish their natural bond.

Here, much more than provision for income tax relief and the occasional "balik kampung" visits may be required. Having a housing policy that enables parents to stay within the same neighbourhood as their children would be a great starting point. Some moderation of present day unrestrained materialism and individualism is very much called for. Development of healthy and well-balanced spiritual and family values, on the other hand, should be aggressively promoted.

For those no longer able or willing to benefit from immediate family support, the answer, quite plainly, is in voluntary or involuntary institutional care. Yet even for these cases, the need to keep them healthy and active should remain paramount.

During our recent visit to Rumah Seri Kenangan, Cheras, we were greeted by a most unusual and heartwarming sight. We saw a handful of elderlies, some well into their 60s, stuck knee-deep in a mud pond harvesting matured catfish that they have been tending for the past six months. Yes, there was mud on their faces, we thought, but surely they must have gold in their heart! This is the spirit that we like our old folks to have when the nation joins the world's rich men's club by 2020. 

THE late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra in his book "Looking Back" portrayed Tan Sri Khir Johari as "quite a character in the Cabinet; a man with a sense of humour and a bag of tricks in his pocket." That was then.

Khir retired from active politics some time ago. He gave up his Merbok Parliamentary seat in 1982. Yet when we met him at his Damansara Heights home in November 1994, we were amazed at how little he has changed. At 71 and despite the recent loss of his beloved wife, his humour and enthusiasm were totally intact. We talked to him about his health and how he has managed to remain active.

On his daily routine

Although I'm out of the government, my tempo has not decreased. I keep myself busy entertaining visitors, mostly friends and associates. The seeds that I have sown years ago still flourish. This sort of thing keeps me happy, at least I'm not forgotten. I was formerly chairman of the Malaysia-Soviet Friendship Society and whenever my Russian friends are in town they always visit me. Two came this morning.

I do a 20-minute session of "tai-chi" every morning at about 7 am. I also

keep abreast with current affairs by doing a fair share of reading, which includes the daily papers and magazines such as the Times, Asiaweek, plus party papers. It takes up a lot of my time.

On social activities

I am currently

president of the World-wide Fund for Nature of Malaysia which I started way back in 1972. I have also been president of the Malaysian Zoological Society since 1961, and I continue to maintain an active interest in this area. It seems fated that I should associate myself with animals.

Apart from this, I am the president of Kiwanis which I founded in 1976. I am proud of it as it is meant for the common people. We have since opened up centres for handicapped children in Petaling Jaya and Johor Bahru. I keep in touch with the Kiwanis movements overseas. I remain today the patron of the National Society of the Deaf. Last but not least I'm president of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

On sports activities

I have always had a keen interest in sports. At present I am deputy president of the Malaysian Olympic Council. I was founder president of the Sepaktakraw Association of Malaysia. This has won me the title of "Bapak Sepaktakraw." Previously, I was president of the Badminton Association of Malaysia for 25 years.

Age has not slowed down Khir Johari, who still keeps as busy as ever. Here, he allows a peek into his life and shares some of his personal thoughts

Seventy-One and Still Going Strong

BY GURMEET KAUR
Photography by Saleh Osman

Khir, enjoying the company of his grandchildren.



Bridging the generation gap through "tai chi".

On business activities

On the business side, I am president of the Institute of Directors and current vice-chairman of Magnum. I sit on the boards of various companies in the Magnum Group.

On travel

I do a fair share of travelling overseas. I don't do it for business much but mainly to visit my old friends. I recently visited China, Korea and Australia. During my trip to Korea, I was invited by the Kiwanis movement of Korea to their general meeting and dinner.

On health

Thank God I am in good health and fit. I like to think that the animals in the zoo are praying for me all the time.

On worries

I never worry. I can take things and separate them, if need be. I lost my wife about a month back, but my activities go on as usual.

On family


Although my children have grown up and left the nest, they come to visit me very regularly. I am most happy talking with and enjoying the company of my grandchildren who are around almost every day. I have seven children - two sons and five daughters - and 12 grandchildren. If and when they are around they keep me very busy.

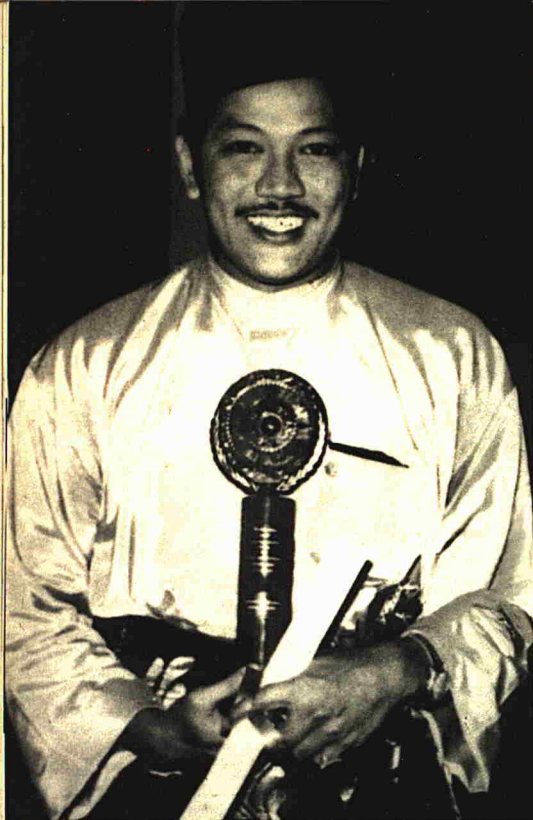
On friends

I have a limited number of close friends, as I am very particular in choosing them. I have a regular group which we call "The A Team" which has depleted upon the passing away of some members. At present only three of us are left and we meet every two weeks to discuss serious matters. This is one way of keeping the interest in current issues alive. I have another close circle of friends from Sungai Petani, Kedah. Our friendship developed during my MP days and they too are very active.

On the need for an ageing policy

I feel the issue is not an easy subject as it involves various ministries and only the government can be expected to be able to formulate and enforce such a policy.

We however must be careful in formulating such a policy to ensure that it is desirable in the context of our country. Whether policies implemented in foreign countries are suitable here should be given consideration. I think more attention should be paid to this issue even though there isn't an urgent need to do so now. Whatever it is, we should broaden our scope of thinking to meet the demands of the future. 



IT could have been a scene from one of his hit movies. Young man with talent and big dreams sings at a fair. It is a song he composed himself, about the beauty of a girl named Azizah.

A big-time movie-maker watches from afar and is impressed. He offers the young man a job and soon after, the young man leaves his island hometown for another island in the south and a star is born.

That is more or less how it happened for P. Ramlee. On that fateful day of August 8 1948 when he left Penang for Singapore, he knew he was chasing his dreams but little did he know he was also taking the first step into the annals of immortality.

For P. Ramlee still lives on, in the hearts and minds of Malaysians and those who have come to love him for his movies and music.

It is now more than two decades since his death, and the man is still reaching out and touching people through his works. His films are shown over and over on television, and at film festivals, earning him a whole host of new fans, many of them born after his lifetime.

Indeed, his movies and music have conquered time, age and racial barriers.

Ramlee's music still evokes the charm of a time past when women dressed in incredibly

P. RAMLEE — A National

tight modern "baju melayu" and dandy mustachioed men in baggy pants and loose coats danced the twist, a-go-go and waltz.

It was a time when people were equally at home dancing the samba, rhumba and tango or the "joget" and "inang." A certain romantic air pervaded almost all the movies. There was a certain magic in films of that era. More so if they were P. Ramlee's.

From tragic lover boy, funnyman to crook, P. Ramlee was unsurpassed in originality. It was not that he was an exceptionally good actor, but he knew how to make a role his very own. The mannerisms and the punchlines were so P. Ramlee that anyone looking or even unconsciously sounding a bit like him runs the risk of being mocked as a poor imitator of what he was.

And what he was, was quite incredible.

From being a nobody who dared to dream,

P. Ramlee soon rose to being the consummate all-rounder - director, scriptwriter, composer, singer, actor-comedian, film editor, producer, etc.

But he did not get there the easy way. People who knew him will testify how at times even he questioned his own abilities. And when he felt he was all alone in his craft or that the criticisms hurled at him were unfair, his confidence wavered. His was a fragile psyche that not many were privy to.

However, he was always in control on the set, says his friend and fellow actor, Aziz Sattar. "We would all contribute our ideas and Ramlee would be very open to suggestions, but the final decision was always his."



P. Ramlee is gone but not forgotten. Even long after his death, this extraordinary man can still reach out and touch the heart through the magic and appeal of his movies and songs

BY FATIMAH ABU BAKAR

Heritage

NSTFILE PHOTOS





Just what is it about this man that has made him one of Malaysia's best-loved sons? What is it about this man that has gained him more fans from generation to generation? And what has he left us with, apart from his movies and songs?

For people still laugh at his antics in his "Bujang Lapuk" series and many confess to still getting goosebumps from his classics like "Anak Ku Sazali", "Antara Dua Darjat" and "Ibu Mertua Ku" which portrayed one of his pet themes - class difference and cultural prejudice, the rich (bad) against the poor (good), with the good inevitably prevailing.

His movies were simply made and the plots uncomplicated, yet they leave one with a long-lasting impression. Ramlee tackled, it seemed, almost everything close to his heart then - class struggle, intermarriage, the family unit, hypocrisy, loyalty, patriotism, religion, undying love, etc.

Some of the scenes he shot in movies like "Antara Dua Darjat" - especially that of "kampung" boys jamming at a house - were so natural one is inclined to believe that was exactly what Ramlee himself had done in his own kampung in Penang with his groups "Teruna Sekampung" and "Rindu Malam."

It was probably after such jamming sessions that he had ventured to perform at the agricultural fair at Bukit Mertajam on June 1 1948.

Most of his movies featured the triumph of the underdog. It was as though he knew what

it was like to come up from way under and had to share this experience with his audience. His message seemed to be that anyone can succeed if he worked hard enough.

P. Ramlee himself would have admitted his rise to fame was not without pain. But he was a driven man.

"You wait and see, I'll be somebody one day," he once told childhood



friend and classmate Siti Noorma Haji Shaari. He was then working in a sundry shop below where Noorma and her family lived in Penang. He did not do too well in school, Noorma remembers, but not because he was unintelligent. He was just too playful and uninterested in studies. Music was his only passion.

And music became his ticket to fame, for his legendary "Azizah" so impressed director B.S. Rajhan from Singapore that Rajhan offered Ramlee a job to provide background music for the film "Cinta" in which Ramlee also appeared.

That was the beginning and the opening Ramlee needed to get into the film industry. Jalan Ampas and the film studios must have seemed like Hollywood to the young P. Ramlee who reportedly started from the bottom doing just about everything from menial odd jobs around the set, being clapper boy, continuity person to writing his musical scores and singing.

Soon after, he began acting, and what he lacked in drop-dead looks (P. Ramlee then was painfully skinny and pimply), he made up for with a wonderfully strong screen presence coupled with a naturalness and honesty that earned him role after role.

The timing was also probably to his favour.



Starting from 1938, the Malay film industry was beginning to take shape, four decades after the launch of the film revolution in the West. It was as if the Malay film world was waiting for someone like him to come along, grab it by the neck and hammer it into shape.

And that was exactly what he did. After proving that he could sing and act, Ramlee went on to direct (and also starred in) his first film "Penarik Beca" in 1955. Of course he fea-



tured his song "Azizah" which became synonymous with the movie about an honest impoverished rickshaw puller who falls for a beautiful girl way above his league. As always, the small man wins.

"Penarik Beca" was voted the best film by "Utusan Filem Dan Sport" magazine and Ramlee was launched as a director and film-maker. He followed up with "Semerah Padi" in 1956 and a year later, "Panca Delima" and "Bujang Lapuk." That was the year he won the Asian Film Festival's Best Actor award in Tokyo for

his dual father-son role in the Phani Majumdar movie "Anak Ku Szali."

It marked the beginning of a string of awards. Ramlee also won the 1959 Asian Film Festival award for Best Comedy Film with "Pendekar Bujang Lapuk", again in 1960 for "Nujum Pak Belalang" and 1964 for "Madu Tiga."

In 1962, he was conferred the Ahli Mangu Negara (AMN) by the third Yang diPertuan Agong.

By the time Ramlee was awarded the Most Versatile Talent at the 1963 Asian Film Festival, he must have thought about what he had said to Noorma. He had certainly come a long way, this man of Achenese descent, who was born Teuku Zakaria bin Teuku Nyak Puteh in 1929 at No.4 Jalan Rawang, an attap and zinc roofed wooden kampung house, and who had his primary education at the Malay School in Kg. Jawa and Francis Light School, and Secondary Three at the Penang Free School.





All in all, he had made about 62 films and written some 500 songs (one report puts it at 250) and right up to the very end never tired of what he was destined to do - make films.

It was sad that towards the last years of his life (he had in 1964 moved to Kuala Lumpur to continue making films at Merdeka Studio in Ulu Klang), Ramlee faced problems raising money for his films. It was as if despite all that he had done, the money men were still either not convinced or had fallen out of love with the magic of P. Ramlee. A magic which, ironi-

cally enough, resurfaced with a vengeance after Ramlee's death from a heart attack on May 29 1973. He was then only 45.

It must have been a bitter pill for him to swallow, to realise how fickle his adoring public could be.

"Hang ingat depa dah lupa kat aku kah (Do you think they have forgotten about me)?" he once asked another friend and actor-singer from Penang Ahmad Daud, when he was overlooked at a prestigious film function. A lesser known personality had been given the





honour of giving away an award instead of him.

Ramlee had sat there quite devastated. But like his screen heroes, none but his close friends knew the turmoil and sadness inside him. They and his wife Saloma were probably the only people who saw how crushed he was that he could no longer get anyone to finance his films.

Seventeen years after his death, Ramlee was posthumously awarded the Darjah Panglima Setia Mahkota (DPSM) carrying the title "Tan Sri" by the Agong, Sultan Azlan Shah.

The modest bungalow in which he lived at 22, Jalan Dedap, Taman Furlong in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur, has been made the P. Ramlee Memorial. His Penang house in Jalan Caunter Hall (re-named Jalan P. Ramlee) was bought over by the National Archives and now stands as another memorial to the legend.


Recording company EMI also had 54 of his songs sent for digital re-



mastering at the famous Abbey Road Studio in London, the results of which are "Kenangan Abadi I (Getaran Jiwa)", "Kenangan Abadi II (Yang Mana Satu Idaman Kalbu)" and "Kenangan Abadi III (Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti)." Each album contains 18 songs.

"Di mana kan ku cari ganti, serupa dengan mu (where can I ever find someone just like you)..." goes the lyrics of one of P. Ramlee's greatest evergreens. Penned by S. Sudarmaji for the movie "Ibu Mertua Ku", it could very well be about him.

"Di mana kan ku cari ganti, mungkin kah di syurga (where can I find someone just like you, perhaps in Heaven) ..." the song yearns on as though telling of the true tragedy of P. Ramlee - he was not truly appreciated when he was alive.

We thank P. Ramlee for his legacy and for capturing for all posterity a time when good triumphed over arrogance and greed, and where every problem had a solution in the end. 



TAN Sri Mubin Sheppard passed away suddenly on September 11 1994 at the age of 89. Although he had not been in good health for over a year, many who had marvelled at the zeal with which he continued to show towards Malaysian history and culture believed he could easily join the ranks of the centenarians.

He was an amazing man in more ways than one. Endowed with boundless energy, a disciplinarian hard on himself as on others, rigid, precise, decisive, persistent and consistent, he could yet be very soft-hearted, capable of being exploited by those who knew how.

Of Irish origin and a graduate of Cambridge University, Tan Sri Mubin came to this country in 1928. Sir Hugh Clifford was then Governor of the Straits Settlement



A younger Mubin in uniform.

gan University, the United States, and author of "Music Cultures Of The Pacific, The Near East And Asia", to record all the best known Ma'nyong plays on videotape.

His serious sojourn into Malaysian history began at Changi Gaol where he commenced his first major work "A History Of Terengganu" which was published after the war and remains an indispensable reference text to this day.

His popular work "Hang Tuah", the incomparable Malay hero, was adapted for a movie starring Malaysia's much-vaunted P. Ramlee. He also wrote "A History Of The Malay Regiment." He played a major role in the founding of the

A Man BY KHOO KAY KIM

Of Culture

He came, he saw, and was conquered

and High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States. Tan Sri Mubin developed a tremendous admiration for Clifford who was one of the unforgettable "giants" among British administrators in this country in the 19th century.

More than that, he soon developed a love for this country which he decided to adopt as his own and contributed immensely to the preservation of its history and culture.

His official career which spanned a period of almost 30 years, with a break from 1942-1945 when he was interned by the Japanese, is carefully recorded in an autobiography titled "Taman Budiman: Memoirs Of An Unorthodox Civil Servant."

Tan Sri Mubin served on the east coast (Terengganu and Kelantan) as well as the west coast (Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan)

and remembered fondly the days when he had to cycle along the coast at low tide in Terengganu. It was the lure of the east coast that turned him into a cultural zealot. Despite strenuous duties, he found time for the traditional arts, initiating for example the Festival of Malay Culture (PESTA) in the Kuala Lumpur Lake Gardens in July 1956 and the Festival of Southeast Asian Music and Drama at the University of Malaya in August 1969.

He was also instrumental in persuading Prof W. Malm, Head of the School of Music at Michi-

Malaysian Historical Society and was, for many years, editor of its popular journal, "Malaya In History." He continued to be active in the society after the creation of Malaysia but gradually shifted his attention to the Royal Asiatic Society, Malaysian branch. In 1972, he became its Honorary Secretary and Honorary Editor. A new phase in the history of the society and its internationally known journal (popularly known as JMBRAS) began.

Again, despite demanding duties, he continued to write - apart from his autobiography, he produced a comprehensive study of

"Malay Decorative Arts And Pastimes" and followed up with a two-volume pictorial biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman (the country's first Prime Minister) whose friendship with Tan Sri Mubin was a bond none could sever.

Such was the confidence Tunku Abdul Rahman had in Tan Sri Mubin that the latter was appointed the first Director of Museum as well as the Director of Archives when the country achieved Independence. And it was on the site of the old Selangor Museum (destroyed by bomb in 1945) that Tan Sri Mubin built the National Museum, now one of the well-known landmarks of Kuala Lumpur.

Much of Tan Sri Mubin's expertise on Malay culture was self-taught. He spent hours interviewing older people and painstakingly collected information whenever he could. The grit and determination with which he pursued what was, indeed, his hobby put to shame many a professional among the locals. If his works need updating, it is because no one can claim to have said the last word on any subject. But because of his intense interest, so much has been preserved which would otherwise have been irretrievable with the passage of time.

He was a person of firm opinions. His training as a civil servant tended to reinforce that which must have been inherent in his character. He made decisions quickly and stood his ground because he believed that procrastination and irresolution only hampered progress. To him, an idea, no sooner conceived, ought to be implemented.

As a historian, he believed in the traditional approach, description and narration. He was not schooled in the methodology of the social sciences and regarded such writings as "not history." Like the good old-fashioned historian, he also tended to be more concerned with the ruling elite rather than the "masses" of modern scholars often ideologically motivated.

Those who understood and, of course, appreciated his thoroughness and efficiency would merely smile at some of his idiosyncracies. Many are of the opinion that he was positively officious. Certainly he brooked no argument. If he disagreed he would, with a wave of his hand, dismiss a counter view.

He subscribed to no complex philosophy: he was inflexible in his understanding of right and wrong. He suffered during his detention at Changi Gaol, being subjected to painful torture by the enemy. He could not forget the cruelty and inhumanity of those who perpetrated such deeds, not only on him but thousands of others. As a result, till the end, he always spoke of the atom bomb as a blessing. More would have

suffered and died compared with the number killed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Even long before his death, he had become a legend. He was identified with the country's traditional culture: he was its ardent preserver and promotor; his views were sought both nationally and internationally. It would not be far-fetched to say that the passing away of Tan Sri Mubin was the passing of an institution.

Although he died at the ripe age of 89, he nevertheless left behind a great deal of work undone. As he grew older, he found it increasingly difficult to share it with others as few among the young these days have displayed the same tenacity, diligence and perseverance so necessary in the work of discovering and analysing art forms which today barely survive, even in remote areas.

But he believed that he had a fulfilling life in this country. In the Epilogue to his "Taman Budiman", he wrote:

"If there is any merit in this chronicle, it lies with the people and the country which captivated a junior civil servant, stimulated his unconventional interests and inspired him to penetrate the barriers of scepticism and inertia, and to look beyond the horizons of officialdom to the dream castles of a Malayan Camelot."

These were outpourings from his heart. They distinguish art from science – the genteel from the clinical. If Tan Sri Mubin had one last wish, it must be that there will be others who can see Malaysia as he saw it, not merely, as many have done, as a land overflowing with milk and honey, but a land of rich variant cultures, sometimes juxtaposing, sometimes intermingling, so often, in one inexplicable way or another, harmonising. This has been the magic of Malaysia – the same which first captivated that raw Irish lad M. Sheppard in 1928. U



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